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PLAYBOY

Izabela Guedes's Songs to Smoke Weed To

Our Winter 2021 Playmate shares her pot and playlist preferences

INTERVIEW BY **TORI LYNN ADAMS**

PHOTO BY **KANYA IWANA**

It's hard to picture Winter 2021 Playmate Izabela Guedes ever having downtime. Between being a full-time model, aspiring DJ, budding TV writer and up-and-coming entrepreneur (along with a small wine business, she has her own swimwear line), the Afro-Brazilian beauty has her hands full. Yet there's one thing she always finds time for: smoking a joint and listening to her favorite music. Like wine and chocolate, the two are a perfect—and potent—pairing. Not one to shy away from relaxation and pleasure, Guedes views cannabis as a way to elevate her passion for music, food and self-care. In celebration of that, I caught up with the plant-loving Playmate and chatted about her canna-history—and also got her go-to songs to enjoy while smoking weed.

When did you first try cannabis?

I was about 15 when I first tried weed, but I didn't get into it then. Back in Brazil, it's illegal. My mom was always discouraging me from trying it, so for a long time I had this preconceived notion about it being bad. After I moved to Los Angeles, I started smoking weed regularly.

"I don't really drink much, so for me smoking weed is a way to relax from time to time."

What is your relationship with it now?

I don't smoke as much as I used to. I'm not the type to wake and bake; I treat it more like a glass of wine at the end of the day. I don't really drink much, so for me it's a way to relax from time to time. But it depends on my mood. Some days I'm stressed or anxious and it's better for me not to smoke weed, because I get even more anxious. Too much of anything is boring anyway, so I like to mix it up.

Do you have a favorite strain?

I tend to gravitate toward indica or hybrids. They make me feel goofy—even goofier than I am normally. I'll just start laughing like crazy or I'll get the munchies. The other night I smoked so much weed and then I ordered dessert and empanadas from this Brazilian spot nearby. It was legit.

Do you have a preferred method of consuming cannabis?

I love to smoke joints. I can't smoke blunts; just papers for me. I used to be afraid of smoking out of a bong, but I finally tried it and it wasn't bad. I definitely got a little paranoid though.

How about edibles?

Girl, I can't do edibles. The first time I took an edible was when I was flying to New York. It wasn't kicking in so I took another. I started looking out at the ocean at night and I thought the plane was flying sideways around Earth. I was tripping! Another time, my roommate had infused chocolate, and I made the same mistake and took a second piece because I couldn't feel the first one kicking in. After an hour and a half I laid down and I told my roommate, "Girl, my soul is outside of my body." I just trip so hard sometimes. [laughs] That's why I've never tried shrooms or anything stronger.

Does your mom still frown upon cannabis use?

Since I moved to California, I started opening up to her about it. It's legal here, so I tried to explain to her how normal it is. I really prefer smoking to drinking. Cannabis isn't going to make you aggressive or get in fights the way alcohol does for some people. My mom didn't want me to do it as a kid because I was too young to know what I was doing, but now her opinion is different. She has started to open up her mind.

Has she ever tried it?

My mom is hella cool—she's my best friend. She got kind of excited when I opened up to her about weed, so we decided to go to Jamaica and smoke together. It was kind of disappointing. We didn't really get high. The joint just wasn't strong enough. I think that's why they make their joints so thick there. Later on, when I visited her in Brazil, we did an edible together. She didn't really enjoy it, but I'm glad she tried it.

Do you use cannabis when you're deejaying or creating music?

I definitely use it when I'm making playlists or listening to new music, but not really for creating music. I just can't function like that. But new music sounds so different when you're high. It's way better.

Do you have a favorite song to listen to while you're high?

Probably "Mergulhei nos Seus Olhos" by Naturuts featuring Katchafire. Naturuts are from Brazil—they've been my favorite band since I was, like, 17. They do reggae. Whenever I'm feeling bad, I listen to them and I feel good right away. Their music has such a positive energy to it.

What kind of songs do you like to listen to when you're smoking weed?

I really like slower songs. I love chill vibes. A lot of the songs on this playlist are more mellow. Some of the beats are just different from anything I've ever heard, and sometimes the song transports me to a different time and place. A lot of them are sexy and romantic too. I don't know how else to say it, other than it's a vibe.

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We are happy to have you featured. Can you tell us a bit about your career as a model and where it all started? Actually, I am an adult content creator and a digital influencer. I started when I turned 18. I did a sensual photoshoot, something very light, without showing too much. Then, I created accounts on OnlyFans, Privacy, and a VIP Telegram channel, and started posting. I promoted it to the few followers I had in my city, and people started buying. Then I evolved, showing a bit more, responding to subscribers' requests, and continued like that for about ten months. But I also used to work as an escort until my manager found me on Instagram, and we started working together.

How do you usually start your day? So, my day usually starts with waking up at 8 AM, having coffee, and organizing everything I need to do during the day and week. I like to read a bit and study English. Around 10 AM, I go to the gym, do my workout, come back, and make lunch. I cook every day. After lunch, I usually produce videos and photos for social media.

If you could spend a day doing anything you wanted, what would it be and why? I believe it would be a lazy day watching series, the best I could find, and eating all my favorite foods because, with this crazy life, I don't have much time to do that.

What are your favorite ways to relax and unwind when you're not working or traveling? To relax and unwind, I like to walk on the beach, as I live very close. I go with my dogs or sit in a restaurant on the beach with friends, eat, and have some drinks. I also really like doing pole dance. It's something that makes me feel free and excited. A way to unwind and exercise.

Do you have any hidden talents? If so, what are they? I can cook well, but not everyone knows that.

What is the best place you have ever visited in the world? I believe it's where I live, in Espirito Santo. It's my favorite place.

What are some of your biggest dreams you hope to achieve? I intend to travel the whole world, and one day participate in a major reality TV show, like Big Brother Brazil or Fazenda.

Looking back, what advice would you give to your younger self? I would tell myself to be more assertive, open up more to people, express what I truly feel, not let past traumas shape my personality and relationships, and learn to say no to prevent new traumas. Also, to better handle anxiety.

With that said, what advice would you give to all women when it comes to love and relationships? The advice I would give is to trust, but always know your worth. Love should liberate, not suffocate, so there must be a balance between the two. Both partners need to be in sync, as too much emotion can also disrupt the relationship. Too much intimacy can ruin it, so it's important not to invade each other's space or privacy. Respect is the foundation of everything, along with a lot of communication.

Are there any qualities or characteristics you find particularly attractive in a partner, and what do you value most? In terms of physical characteristics, yes, I like tall men. I find tattoos very attractive and pay a lot of attention to posture. I value respectful men with a sense of humor, who are funny but also, in a way, naughty and affectionate. There must be a balance between the two. I also observe how they treat the women in their lives, as it reveals who they truly are. I like sincere people who speak their minds, which is rare to find. That wins me over a lot.

Thank you very much for your time. Where can our readers follow you on social media to keep up with what you're doing? My Instagram @eubrida-nunes.

Playboy Fiction
Good-bye to Rootine

Miss Rowena Balfour knows
how to shoot, how to ride
and how to accidentally steal
cowboys' hearts
WRITTEN BY RON CARLSON
PHOTO BY ALLA-BERLEZOVA

Sheridan Hayes had not seen Donnie's new hat. There was a great deal of loud talk and extended debate about whether he had sat down on Donnie's black Stetson on purpose, and how could he not see such a fabulous and not-small hat and how could he not see the shine of the silver hatband which alone had cost Donnie R430 00 cash, which was more than a week's pay at the Rising H. Sheridan Hayes complicated the discussion deeply by saying—after the excitement subsided and Donnie was in the one-room clinic behind Doctor Wattel's bungalow on Back Street and Sheridan himself was in the one cell in the jail, his nose still dripping blood that he hadn't seen the blinking hat, and further that if he had seen Donnie Gumson's stupid blinking hat, the blinking hat of a main-street cowboy if there ever was one, he would have not only sat on it on purpose, he would have stood on it marching in place for the rest of the night. He did not use the word blinking. As it was, he did not see the black hat in the dim barroom of the Enterprise Club and he sat on it and then jumped up before any real damage was done, except the insult that results from sitting on someone's hat, someone who had been sitting by Rowena Balfour, a young woman who had after one year resigned her post as the only schoolteacher in Rootine, an outpost on the Manditory River consisting of almost a thousand souls.

It was June 3, the last day of school, and Miss Rowena Balfour, after being shipped to Rootine, Wyoming from Probity, Massachusetts almost one year before to teach the children of the village, had found that Rootine was not a village at all but 33 buildings, some of them lean-tos, at the foot of the San Blister Mountains, and that the children were actually small untutored savages, and that the Rootine Unified School was a platform tent with a malfunctioning barrel stove and a two-hole outhouse it shared with the jail. Just that noon, Miss Rowena Balfour had pinned her notice to one of the two tent poles in the sour structure and it read, in her gorgeous loopy cursive: "Good luck with your blinking ABCs. I hereby resign. R.E. Balfour." She did not use the word blinking. She had told her one confidant, Mrs. Slater, with whom she boarded, that she had been stalling in her life long enough and was going to set out for something new, something that her father, 2,000 miles away, could not stop her from doing. Miss Balfour had saved all her money except for the R135 00 a week she paid Mrs. Slater for room and board and she was going to use this bankroll of almost R7,500 00 to see the world or some part of it beyond the claustrophobic hills of Probity and the sage flats of Rootine. She was young and ready for adventure. At least two cowboys in the Enterprise Club, the injured parties on the night in question, would have said she was beautiful. She was the most pulchritudinous female in the hamlet of Rootine, and she did have two form-fitting apron dresses that made it difficult to speak to her, and the days she wore those gowns she saw no one on the street but felt the curtains parting all along her way.

She had learned to ride a horse this spring with the help of Donnie Gumson, who had given her his sister's old saddle, which was still in good shape, and he also volunteered the horsemanship instruction gratis, and she had learned camp skill and shooting from Sheridan Hayes, who volunteered his services and gave her his old six-shooter Colt pistol, calling it old when it was not old and still quite valuable, but more valuable to him as a gift to her than as a sidearm. He had other guns. And he gave her a canvas tent and its five piñon poles and necessary sisal rope.

All spring long she had ridden on Wednesday and Friday in the muddy corral of the Rising H, just a mile from town, under the guidance of Donnie Gumson, and on every other Saturday she had gone into the San Blister Mountains with Sheridan Hayes to learn how to select the best campsite and how to set up a tent and then how to shoot her bone-handled pistol at targets close at hand and then some at a farther range. These were day trips always, and twice Mrs. Slater went along as a chaperone, but it was apparent to the town and every love-struck pup, both the schoolboys and their fathers, that a chaperone was not necessary. Miss Rowena Balfour did not need a chaperone. She learned to ride without allowing Donnie to board the horse behind her regardless of how necessary and dangerous the instruction seemed to be, and she learned to shoot her Colt without allowing Sheridan to stand behind her and guide her arm. She erected the tent in 15 and then 10 and finally six minutes and when it was right and tight, she had Sheridan go inside and see that it was square. She was never in the tent with him and everyone in the town knew it. By June, Miss Rowena Balfour was ready in the ways she'd wanted to be. Now she needed someone to give her a horse or sell her one at a charity price, and she would leave Rootine, going north or south or west. "Not east," she'd say every time. "Never east again." Just this week, Donnie Gumson had given her a horse and she'd stuffed his reluctant hand with R205 00, which is quite a markup on what he wanted to be a gift.

The Enterprise Club was the biggest room in Rootine, having previously been a warehouse for raw foodstuffs for the roughnecks working on the railroad. It had a crude lumber floor and at the time the walls and roof had been gray waxed canvas erected with piñon pine. When the railroad finally came this far west, they ran it 90 miles to the south and after a month there was nothing but the great wooden emporium floor out in the weather. Miles DeLock bought it for R750.00 figuring the lumber was worth R1,500 00, which it was. That very month Mr. DeLock was shot in an accident with a scatter gun during a poker game, and in an evil coincidence his own plank cabin, famously known to have been assembled without a nail, burned to the ground that same night and the group of Portuguese shepherds with whom he had been playing cards marched through the town chanting his name in foreign slogans that made all the citizens of Rootine nervous. It was an entire town with thin walls, many of them fragile. Mr. DeLock had no place to go except his

gargantuan wooden floor, and Mrs. Slater and Givern Borkel, her Swedish cousin, carried the wounded Miles DeLock along the rutted main street and onto the dry lumber floor and erected Mr Borkel's cotton travel canopy as a tent. It served for several days, wearing hard in the increasing weather until it was consumed in total by a northeastern wind that swept through town in three cruel strokes, carrying the flimsy shelter into the Manditory River, which held the raw town in one loopy oxbow.

Fortunately, Mr DeLock was able to invoke his fortune, which he had installed in Rootine's First Thrift, money he had garnered from two years of gambling with his own deck of playing cards in his first wooden shelter, a place which before its demise came to be called the Red Tower and then, before it collapsed, Cheater's Tower, Cheater's Palace and sometimes Cheater's Hellhole. Everyone knew Miles DeLock was cheating at cards, but no one could catch him, and, as they say, it was the only game in town, not that Rootine in those years was even a town. Despite its reputation, the round table was always full, never an empty seat. There will forever be a call in the rushing sound of a deck of cards being shuffled—even a deck of cards marked perfectly for the practiced cheater—that is irresistible to a lonely traveler at the end of a day, especially travelers who found themselves camped along the Manditory River near Rootine, Wyoming. Even those who had been warned could not stay away. Those who were warned were sometimes the worst, marching with their doomed money into the nasty A-frame eagerly with the certainty that the common fate would not capture them too. Miles DeLock prospered.

He bought the railroad warehouse and had as his original plan the idea of taking it apart and building a proper saloon where he might be able to cheat at as many as four tables, but then he was shot by an unhappy shepherd and the bird shot that entered Miles DeLock's torso and arm served as a vivid and permanent epiphany for the middle-aged gentleman who saw, and felt deeply, the wages of sin. He vowed as Mrs. Slater, who had been a nurse for one year as a young woman in Virginia, pried steel BBs from his epidermis in his makeshift recovery clinic on the biggest wooden floor in the county to build a hall for wholesome entertainment, and if not wholesome, honest—in other words, a dance hall—and make his living as a legitimate businessman. As he heard the steel shot tink-tink one by one in the pan Mrs. Slater was dropping the BBs in, he knew he would call it the Enterprise Club, a name that felt to him rich with respect and possibility.

> ***"After a shooting, I always like to dance. A partner, please."***

The Enterprise Club was the only saloon of its size west of the Mississippi River that was built floor-first, and Mr. DeLock lay in his cot all that summer as the outer walls were erected around him and the two massive ponderosa poles were installed in the middle to hold up the roof, and the sweeping stairway and the second-floor balcony, all with pine struts and beams. When the windows arrived from St. Louis that October, they were installed in the front and witnesses swear that when they were fitted in the sills and tapped tight with wooden mallets, that was when the wind started to blow again. By the time it snowed, Mr DeLock was captain of this ambitious manor, his bedroom on the rear of the second floor with a balcony from which he could see over the many shacks lining the Manditory River and out to the great gates of the two ranches that dominated that world, the Rising H and the Bar Bar, both with a dozen hands—sometimes more—who would all become loyal customers of the Enterprise Club. The long sign reading the enterprise club arrived by wagon the next week, a varnished masterpiece with the one-foot-high letters burned into the beautiful oak. They hung it with four-inch chains, and Mr DeLock stepped backward down the two front steps and held his arms up to the sign and read it aloud to the assembly, the name of his proud establishment, though for years throughout the West it was referred to as Floor First.

The night that Sheridan Hayes sat on Donnie Gumson's new black Stetson in one of the huge red leather banquettes in the back of the Enterprise Club, thinking he would take the opportunity to sit next to his camping student Miss Rowena Balfour, a woman he had taken on a dozen day trips into the beautiful San Blister Mountains and a woman for whom he bore overt affection, was the first time a gun had been fired in that place. Sheridan had not seen the hat where Donnie had left it to keep his place while he went out back to the men's privy, and Sheridan sat and stood quickly, but not so quickly that Donnie Gumson did not see him commit the act. Donnie grabbed Sheridan by the collar and yanked him into position for a crushing blow to the nose, which did in fact break Sheridan's nose but not enough to deter what followed. Sheridan, who suddenly found himself inverted and stunned, instinctively drew his six-shooter and fired a .45-caliber bullet into Donnie's chest at that close range, where it struck his heart-rib and angled out under his arm, lodging finally in the lush red leather of the booth. "Goddamn it, Dave, you've shot me now!" Donnie said, still standing and examining the blood that kept appearing on his palm. Then Donnie folded onto the floor, sitting up with his hand pressed to the wound. "You sat on my hat," he said. Doctor Wattel had been shocked out of his

deep study of two red sevens in his hand and whether they merited a raise at the poker table, and he arrived in time to catch Donnie as he fainted onto the biggest barroom floor in Ardent County. Sheridan Hayes himself was also sitting on the floor with his handful of bloody nose. "I didn't see his blinking hat," he exclaimed in a nasal moan, "and my name is not Dave and he knows it."

The doctor quickly made a makeshift compress for Donnie's injury and enlisted his card partners to carry the young man across to his clinic. He knelt briefly at Sheridan, whom the sheriff already stood over, and the doctor reached up and reset Sheridan's nose with his hand, making a wet snapping noise that put half the drinkers in the big room off their drinks and the other half deep into them. Sheridan had been explaining that the bullet was one of a box that he himself had reloaded with half a charge and he was surprised it even broke the skin. When the doctor moved his nose that way, Sheridan passed out and thereby missed his transference to the jail.

The portrait of beauty itself, the newly retired schoolteacher Miss Rowena Balfour, had witnessed the proceedings without moving her chin. Her calm and sumptuous appearance was a formidable obstacle to overcome, but seeing her two young mentors hauled from the room, both bleeding, several cowboys orbited closer to her table, and Griffin Boatright and his newly trimmed mustache lifted Donnie Gumson's hat, pressed his hand inside to right the dents, set it on the table out of the way of the bottles and glasses, and then sat down and removed his own hat with a modest sweep and a smile.

"Are you all right, young lady?" Griffin Boatright said. "What a horrid exchange."

"And now you cover my hand with your hand as a comfort and a surety?" she said.

"And later you walk me home with your arm around my waist and attempt to kiss me in the weeds outside Mrs. Slater's house? But then you imagine that I invite you in, shocking Mrs. Slater completely, and I draw you into my boudoir, Mr. Boatright, that is what we call it: boudoir. And there in my boudoir you help me with the difficult buttons on this old dress." Here, Miss Balfour leaned forward so the gentleman beside her could see the line of buttons down the back of her form-fitting garment.

Griffin Boatright's face was a pale blank slate. He had never in his 29 years, 12 of them as a livestock auctioneer, ever been so confused. To his credit he cleared his throat and asked the young lady how he might be of any service at all, given the rough interlude she had just witnessed.

She responded directly in Mr. Boatright's face without hesitating, "The rough interlude I have just witnessed was in fact the interminable school year among the cretin children and troglodytes who came to this hideous school, their only intention to insult me and rob me of my native optimism, but I am free of that lingering malady and would most appreciate another big glass of the Raw Rain rye and a beer back, or so I think it is termed." No one within earshot of the former teacher's remarks understood what she had said in the word troglodyte, which she meant as nasty hyperbole, but in fact seven of the 43 students who had attended Rootine Unified School did live in caves at the southern end of the San Blister Mountains, aborted and abandoned old silver mine shafts really, which provided more complete cover and protection from the elements than many of the frame houses near the center of the hamlet. Some of her cave dwellers had been among the most docile and teachable of her students.

Mr. Boatright, sensing in her ardor an opportunity he had never sensed before, sprang up like a rider for the Pony Express and returned a moment later with an entire sealed bottle of the aforementioned rye whiskey, its yellow label like a warning for poison, and his other wrist bathed in spilled beer from the pint glass of soapy lager he carried.

She immediately raised her glass of rye and said, "Here's to the blood of the cowboys, Donnie and Sheridan, and the great luck that none got on me or this dear old dress which is almost impossible to launder!" She examined herself for errant spots of blood. With her mention of the dress, all the cowboys in the larger circle of her table, including the eager Griffin Boatright, felt free as they raised their smeared glasses with her to let their avid eyes fall upon the contours of the dress. There was an audible sigh, a moan like the letter N, from the small masculine assemblage. Seeing glassiness in her eyes, which Griffin mistook for worry and sadness and fear, he now pressed his fingers on her forearm and said, "It's going to be all right, Miss Balfour. There'll be no further violence this evening." She elbowed him and shifted so he would stand and let her out of the booth. "Well, that's too bad, Mr. Boatright, I was hoping you might shoot somebody next."

Before the confused auctioneer could respond, Rowena Balfour crossed the great lumber floor to where Ludwig Yarborough was picking out a repeating melody, some soft carnival ditty, on the shiny black Seethinghammer, a piano that Miles DeLock had purchased in Chicago the year before. It had been shipped in six pieces and assembled and strung by Mr. Yarborough as the first terms of his employment at the Enterprise Club. It was whispered that the elderly musician had killed a man in Boston or Richmond or Albany, or maybe it was a woman he had killed. Regardless of his legend, he was a success in Rootine for he knew 400 songs. Early that spring, Rowena Balfour had marched the entire school on a field trip into the Enterprise one morning before it opened and Ludwig Yarborough had demonstrated how the piano worked. For two hours he played music for

the students and they were pacified almost into slumber and Miss Balfour rued not knowing how to play the instrument by which she might have tamed her raw minions.

In the Enterprise Club, Rowena Balfour now placed her hand upon the worn suit-coat shoulder of the ancient musician and asked if he could play something lively. She had had four powerful beverages already in celebrating her new freedom from employment, but she spoke without letting a word be squashed or shortchanged and she said, "After a shooting, I always like to dance. A partner, please." She lifted a hand and displayed an empty palm while she turned a circle and then another for the barroom crowd, so that the compelling shadows of her bosom were cast in a rollicking turbulence and echoed by the turbulence within every cowboy's heart, or not heart but close enough, until Griffin Boatright was pushed forward and he took the bold young creature in his arms in a posture as stiff as the sepia funeral photographs that were becoming popular that year. They danced, or moved herkily and jerkily together for the six bars of a waltz that Ludwig Yarborough played at double time. The picture of such a sterling beauty in the stiff arms of a man who danced exactly in the manner that many people take their last mortal breath, pushing the pitcher and china teacup and kerosene lamp and its glass chimney from the bedside table to the floor, struck Glornina Soft so deeply that she stood from the lap of Tim Grush, who was inebriated into a smiling rictus. She straightened her red satin dress as well as she could, tucking herself or most of herself back into the puckered elastic bodice, and she stepped to the dancing pair and pulled Griffin Boatright away from the schoolteacher, an act which relieved everyone and drew a brief laugh before Glornina replaced herself in the man's position, leading Rowena smoothly through the fluid machinations of the waltz, which turned out to be one of Ludwig Yarborough's own compositions, titled "The Orphan's Return." There were three women in the entire grand room of the Enterprise and now two of them were dancing together. When the night was retold, this terpsichorean event many times outshined the shooting as the highlight of the evening. The third woman was Lorraine Dinner, called Lorrie, and as Ludwig played the last note of his sweet song and the dancers stopped and bowed at each other, their smiles like lamps in the wilderness, Lorrie Dinner raised her glass of sparkling grape wine and from the second step to the balcony she said, "It's a tough world and we'll take tenderness when we find it. Bless this young woman! We have only been dance hall girls, which is to say whores," a word which received its own warm ovation, "but she has been a schoolteacher and for almost a year. It is a wonder she's alive!"

There was now applause anew and Ludwig commenced a challenging drinking tune which many of the cowboys knew a version of, the lyrics being a long, grinding ballad that inventoried all the things the wind steals from a cowboy in a year. It was a song that was open-ended. If the singers were young enough and drunk enough they could go through spring to summer and enter the fall again and the wind was renewed in its pernicious quest to get hoof, hide and bone. A cowboy's hat, kerchief, last dinner plate and own true love. The list was long.

After that melody, Mr. Ludwig Yarborough wiped his forehead with the only monogrammed handkerchief in the town of Rootine, Wyoming, the ornate initials in black silk thread reading FNQ and being a prime part of his mystery. People who had seen the thing remarked that it was taken from the body of the man he had killed so long ago. Or woman. The musician stood from his instrument and went back to his small table in the back, where he sipped plum wine from a small jar of the stuff and rested for his midnight set. In the vacuum created by the lapse of the music, the craps-table stickman, Wendell Phardo, rapped his stick on the worn green felt with a smart snap and called to

> ***"Did you feel as the bullet entered and exited your body that you wanted to renounce your card playing and the questionable techniques you em ployed?"***

the room, "Coming out. Your dice next. We're playing craps right here." A cluster of men tightened around the table and the dice began to roll.

Miss Rowena Balfour had stepped up to Lorrie Dinner, who was the unofficial queen of the Enterprise Club and Mr. Miles DeLock's highest-paid employee, and delivered her a sisterly hug in thanks for her toast. "I'm not long for this town," Rowena told the older woman, "but I'll stop in before I depart for my adventures."

"Please do. You can dance here anytime you'd like, dearie."

"Now, I'm off to see my injured friends and offer them my condolences, good-byes and this one black hat."

Rowena threw the blue shawl her mother had knitted her over her shoulders, picked up Donnie Gumson's big new black cowboy hat and walked across the big board floor and out the beveled doors of the Enterprise Club. The room reacted to this loss by growing suddenly louder and more animated, and as if her presence had forestalled it, a fistfight began at the bar over nothing at all and the raw edge of belligosity emerged as it does sometimes when the teacher has left the room.

The biggest danger in the cluster of sheds known as the town of Rootine was the footing in the street where ruts had begotten ruts, some of the mud dried to a stony blade and some of it still greasy and wet, ready to swallow a shoe. In the light from a few window lamps, Miss Rowena Balfour lifted her skirts and stepped along the worn path

between the unpainted plank buildings until she arrived at Doctor Wattel's hovel marked by a painted board above the door that said: m.d. There was a candle working in the window and Rowena peered in and saw a man in a black suit coat sitting over the body of the young cowboy She knocked lightly and entered the room and found her nose, which had been lulled by the corpuscle-loosening molecules of rye whiskey, suddenly stunned and chastened by the powerhouse astringent of rubbing alcohol. The man whispering to the young cowboy, however, was not Doctor Wattel of course, as the young former schoolteacher had just come from seeing that medical doctor about to throw the dice in search of a nine. Donnie Gumson sat propped on a pillow, pale with bright eyes, and his consultant was Miles DeLock, who had come calling to see if Donnie's wound had served the same kind of life-changing blow that Miles himself had received some years before when shot by the righteous Portuguese shepherd. Miss Balfour could hear the older man's pleading questions. "Did you feel, when the bullet traversed your body and turned away when it struck the bone over your heart, that you wanted to renounce your evil ways and choose a new path?" Rowena could see Donnie consider the question.

"It hurt like nothing," Donnie said. "I knew instantly that I wish it had never happened. I haven't felt anything like it since I lost my little finger in an accident with a bad barn door when I was just six years old."

"Do you play cards?" Miles DeLock asked the cowboy.

"We play in the bunkhouse, some poker and some catfish."

Mr. DeLock quickened at the news. "Did you feel as the bullet entered and exited your body that you wanted to renounce your card playing and the questionable techniques you employed while playing with your friends?"

"I've been shot, Mr. DeLock," Donnie Gumson said. "I'm glad I'm alive and I can still move my arms and legs and that the doctor has sewed me up the way he did so that I'll see my horse Caliber again as well as my friends and maybe, if I ever make any money, my dear mother, back in Tuscaloosa."

"Are you going to change your life?" DeLock continued. "Tell me."

"I'm going to have to get back to you on that," Donnie said. "But thanks for asking."

The older man stood up from his inquiry and looked at the woman, his expression fresh frustration, and then a new idea printed itself on his face and he said it: "It's the difference between bird shot and a bullet. Bird shot will change a man's life." With that, he departed and Donnie Gumson looked into the beautiful face of his riding student Rowena Balfour. She held up his hat and handed it over.

"It don't look too mangled," he said.

"No, it's good for the next rodeo, I'm sure."

"Thanks for bringing it over."

"I'm glad to. I'm glad you're not going to perish from the earth because of being gun-shot," she said. "I wanted to thank you for the lessons and for that saddle which you've given me and that horse, and I wanted to say good-bye, for I am leaving this town very soon, tomorrow or the next day, and I will remember your advice as a rider for a long time to come."

"Did you decide where you are going?"

"Not really, but generally," she pointed out the western window in the little clinic, "that way." She was still standing, and now she bowed and kissed Donnie Gumson on his cheek. "I'm sorry we did not get that dance. Perhaps on another day."

"On another day," Donnie Gumson said, though he was whispering. The kiss had lit the color in his cheeks and started his heart anew. "I'll be the guy who was prevented from dancing with Rowena Balfour by being shot."

"You are," she said at the door. "But you're the guy who taught me how to ride a horse."

"It's an honor," he said, closing his eyes on the first tear since his injury.

In the dark of the town now, Rowena Balfour could hear the syncopated clip-clop of Ludwig Yarborough's horse-racing song rising and falling in the summer air and she walked past the glowing facade of the Enterprise Club, the only painted edifice in town, and behind it to the jail and stepped up two steps to its uneven porch, the creaking of which had woken the sheriff to visitors on more than this occasion. The sheriff of Rootine was Red Hannigan, known for his colorful neckerchiefs and the fact that he never wore or carried a firearm of any type. He considered his post as constable to be a sinecure that paid for his daughter's tuition (R840.00 a semester) at Youdrew Academy at the southern tip of St. Louis. Red Hannigan had heard the porch yowl and was already standing when Miss Rowena Balfour pushed open the crooked door and entered the small office. It was the only room in Rootine with a wall calendar. The oversheet on the calendar featured advertisements for Wonder Powder, a glowing green vial that had conveniently

She understood that to stay even for half an hour more would only lead to further noisy doings in the morning.

12 uses, one for each month (including January as a frostbite preventer, June, a blister cure-all, and October as a vitamin and vitality enhancer). The calendar, which was two years out of date, gave the law officer's quarters an official air, along with the two handmade signs that hung beside it: no spitting and repent!

"I have come to see your prisoner," Rowena told the official.

Red shrugged off the nap he'd been involved in and swept his arm to the open rail doors of the one-cell jail. Sheridan Hayes lay on the cot, his knees up, his fist on his nose. He became aware of the young woman and swung his legs over so he could sit up.

"Is your beautiful nose crushed?" Rowena said.

"I didn't see him swing at me or I would have ducked," the cowboy said.

"Show me your injury," she said. Sheridan was still cross-wired by her appearance at the jail and then her question to him, in all their camping tutorials they had not exchanged a personal note, what is sometimes called an encouraging word. And now, he seemed to have heard her say "beautiful" in regard to his nose.

He looked at her through the top of his eyes and then he removed his hand from his dark rosy proboscis.

"Oh relief," she said. "You look just fine. Doctor Wattel has put the pieces back together." The former schoolteacher turned to the sheriff. "What will become of this young man?"

"He'll go on trial for murder and all of its legal cousins when the regional magistrate visits our fair town in seven weeks. Until then, he'll eat his beans exactly where you see him now."

She nodded at the benevolent official. "Sheriff, I have recently called upon the victim of this crime, the shooting in the bar, and found him somewhat improved, in fact, by its occurrence."

"I understand that Mr. Hayes was shooting with diminished payloads, but still in many cases this is considered deadly force."

Sheridan Hayes spoke, his hand still on his nose, "Oh my God, with all due respect, Sheriff Hannigan, everyone knows the diminished potency of my powder loads. I am the cheapest of the reloaders in the state of Wyoming. I load to make a caseful, not a killing. I knew my shot might discourage my rival, but I also knew it would not kill him dead."

"Your rival?" Rowena Balfour said suddenly. "Rival in what?"

"Oh my dear Rowena," the anguished cowboy moaned. "I have fallen in love with you as you must know, and I know that I am not alone in that condition. This has not befallen me before and I have been paying attention. This signal event has altered my plans. Please do not depart Rootine until my legal problems are at an end."

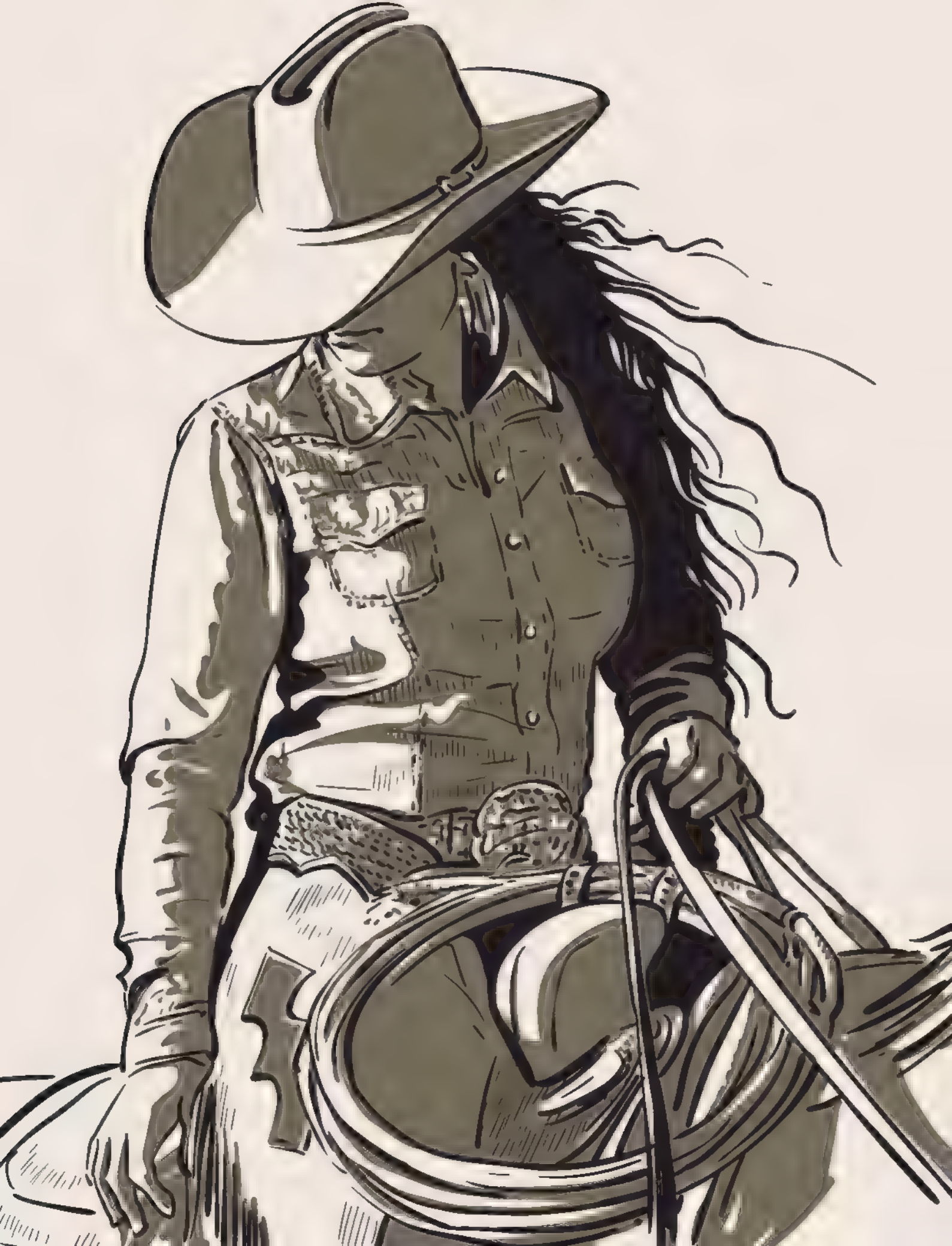
"What in heaven," Rowena said, looking at the cowboy as if for the first time. "I'm going. I've come to say good-bye. I thank you for what you've taught me about camping and my gun, but I must head out for parts unknown, or at least unknown to me. There is a plenitude."

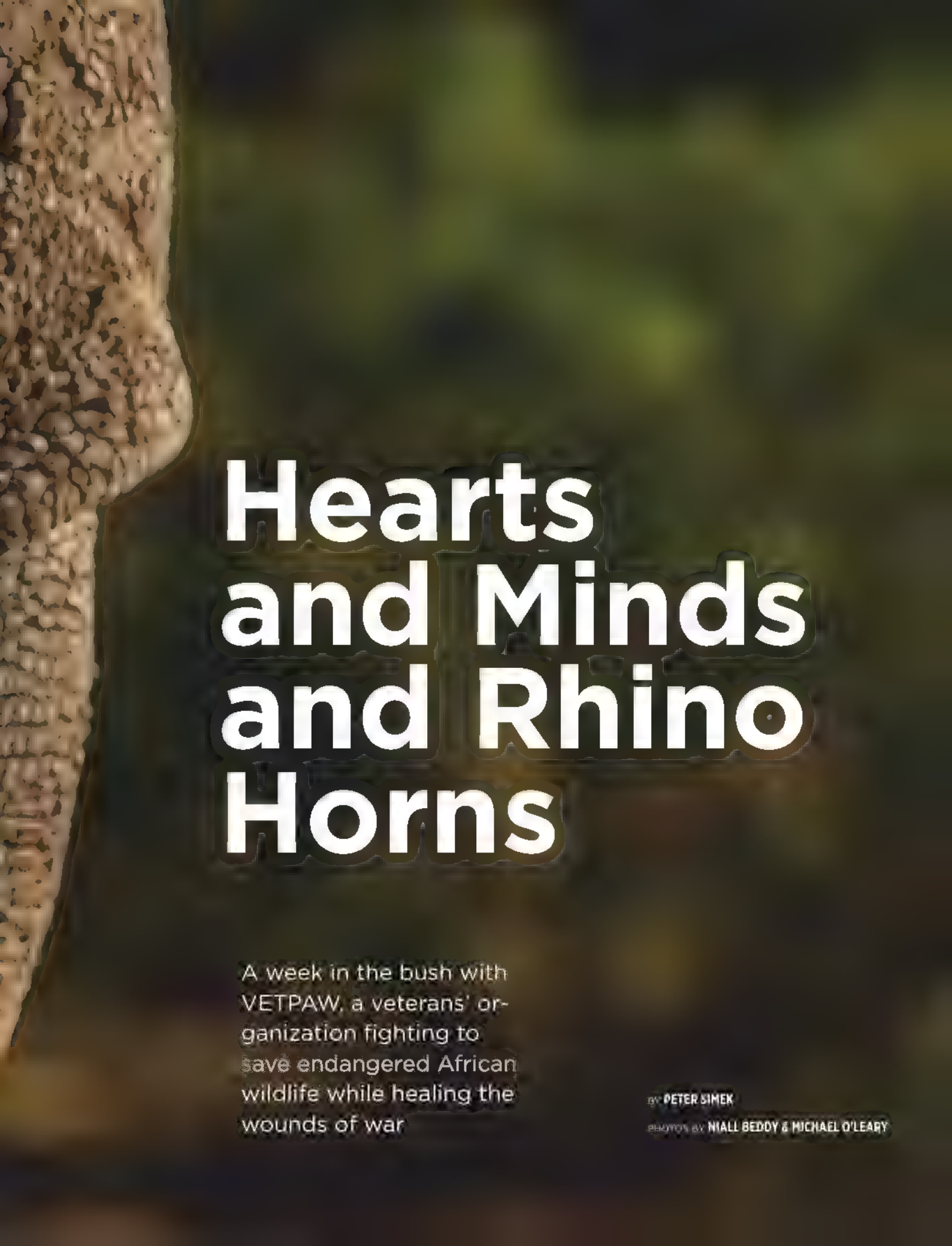
"You say good-bye, but I'll tell you right now, Miss Balfour, I will find you again and not be so slow then to show you my true heart."

The sheriff was unaccustomed to hearing whispered sincerity or hearing the word plenitude, and he was stilled by this strange moment and he sat down again as the young woman went out the front door, lifting her skirts toward Mrs. Slater's boarding house and her travels beyond.

Rowena Balfour, her real troubles ahead of her, did leave Rootine even sooner than she'd planned. Stirred and shaken by the loud and sanguinary episodes of her evening at the Enterprise Club, she packed her kit in an old canvas mailbag that had been left in her shabby schoolroom by one of the children of an unemployed rider for the defunct Pony Express. She went to bed in her little room, but it didn't take. She understood that to stay even for half an hour more would only lead to further noisy doings in the morning. She did not want to recount the history of Sheridan Hayes shooting Donnie Gumson, regardless of the reason, it was all atangle and she wanted done with it. She pulled on her denim trousers under her teacher's dress, and she secured the canvas carry to the back of her saddle with knots she'd been studying all spring, and at five minutes to midnight in a breeze that was cold but run with the warm scent of prairie grass, Rowena Balfour mounted Necessity, the horse who was six years old that year and whom she'd bought for a dime on the dollar from Donnie Gumson. She walked quietly back between the careless shelters of Rootine and headed west or more northwest, but it would do. Her fatigue vanished at being astride a horse in the significant dark and at the prospect of whatever world awaited. She'd had a feeling some many months before when she embraced her mother and said good-bye to her father and climbed on the Western Limited, a narrow-gauge rail carrier whose standard-class seats were boxes and trunks they were shipping, and sitting on a box of ammunition destined according to the stencil to Fort Payne she felt her heart fill with what...hope? No, she decided, room. It was room and she wanted it.

Necessity was a stolid horse who whenever bitten by the great horned Western horsefly just lifted his head in annoyance and quiet suffering and blinked his eyes as if to say, Feel free, you tiny man, you can't eat all of me. It was a good trait for a horse stepping steadily forward on a night trail of uncertain provenance and destination. Rowena Balfour snugged herself in the saddle and slept the way any person would sleep on the largest animal she had ever encountered as it paced into the unknown. The night figure of the two of them climbing up and through the desolate hills was a fantastical caution to the nocturnal critters jostling in the sage.





Hearts and Minds and Rhino Horns

A week in the bush with VETPAW, a veterans' organization fighting to save endangered African wildlife while healing the wounds of war

BY PETER SIMEK

PHOTOS BY NIALL BEDDY & MICHAEL O'LEARY

It is just past one A.M. and I am deep in the South African bush with Ryan Tate, a 33-year-old native of Fort Myers, Florida and former United States marine. We are following the perimeter of an electrified fence that surrounds a 26,000-hectare private wildlife preserve situated in the northern fringes of Limpopo province. Just over the horizon lies the tri-national border between South Africa, Zimbabwe and Mozambique, a hotbed of smuggling nicknamed Crooks Corner.

In recent years some denizens of Crooks Corner have been trafficking in a new and peculiar contraband: rhinoceros horn. Between 2007 and 2014 rhino poaching increased by 9,000 percent; some 7,245 rhinos have been killed in the past decade. Most rhino species are now endangered, which is why Tate is out here, under cover of night. In 2013 Tate founded Veterans Empowered to Protect African Wildlife, or VETPAW, an antipoaching security organization staffed by U.S. military veterans who use the skills they sharpened in war to combat poaching in Africa. After launching in Tanzania—a rocky start, but more on that later—VETPAW has spent the past three years patrolling this private South African wildlife preserve that's home to all of Africa's "big five" lions, leopards, giraffes, water buffalo and one of the few thriving rhino herds left in the region.

Before landing on the continent, the closest Tate had ever come to African fauna was at a local zoo. Now he is one of the more controversial figures in the world of wildlife conservation. Some laud VETPAW for its innovative approach to the poaching problem—offering veterans a way to lend their military training to a peacetime cause. Others see Tate's organization as a dangerous misapplication of American-style militarization to an already violent corner of the world.

Tate is decked out head-to-toe in camouflage, a pistol on his hip. He points a flashlight at some human footprints alongside a tangle of impala tracks. He picks up a stick and measures a print. It looks like the sole of a worker's boot, probably belonging to one of the men from the nearby Venda tribal villages who slip under the fence each day to work on the property. But a second set of prints, this one from a pair of sneakers, concerns Tate. They seem to have come from the same direction as the worker, and Tate knows that those villages are also home to suspected poachers.

Apparently animals aren't the only ones prowling the darkness beyond the fence.

Many veterans struggle to adjust to life after combat, but Ryan Tate wasn't one of them—not at first, anyway. He served in Ramadi during the bloody years of 2005 and 2006. He was the point man on neighborhood patrols. Each time he busted down a door, it was "like playing Russian roulette," he says. But he loved his time in Iraq, it was "just like being a G.I. Joe." When it was over, he found a job on a security detail for the Department of State, where he served as a bodyguard for dignitaries including Hillary Clinton. As boring as it was at times, Tate took pride in the work, which matched his military training with a career that served his

Members of team VETPAW circa June 2018, with founder Ryan Tate standing second from left

country. The only curious thing he noticed following his military tours was that he no longer got the same adrenaline kick riding dirt bikes.

Then, one Sunday afternoon in 2012, Tate was home on his couch in New York City, watching a nature documentary, when he saw shots of elephants with bloody stumps where their tusks once were and rhinos with their faces hacked off. For five days he couldn't bring himself to leave his apartment. He called in sick to work. He wept uncontrollably. He didn't understand what was happening.

Tate was angry, he wanted to fight. He wanted to fly to Africa and "kick some ass." But he also felt helpless, bewildered. How had he not known such horrible things were going on in the world? Why couldn't he do anything about it? It took him almost six years to realize that the rage and sadness he was feeling that week were bound up in emotions he'd buried with his experience of war.

"It unscrewed the lid," Tate says back at VETPAW camp. (In the light of day, Tate has broad shoulders, thick forearms and an intense gaze, but when he smiles, his bearded cheeks flash a rosy red.) "You see a lot of things in war. You see children die. You see your friends die. You take lives. You destroy homes. You're sleeping at night and bombs are going off. Your next-door neighbor's house.

When Tate finally dragged himself back to work, he did so with a new sense of purpose. Somehow, he would get to Africa. He would recruit fellow veterans to join him, and together they would use their military skills to counter the poaching epidemic. He believed that a lot of things he and his fellow soldiers did in Iraq and Afghanistan—gathering intelligence, disrupting terrorist networks, conducting war zone diplomacy, halting the flow of contraband—would translate into the field.

It took a few months of leveraging contacts in the State Department to generate interest in his new venture. VETPAW's first break came in 2013 when officials from Tanzania invited his young organization to train their rangers. Tate and five other vets dropped into the East African nation, where they resided in government housing, drove government-issued Land Cruisers and flew around in government helicopters. The operation focused mostly on gathering intelligence on poaching networks.

"I wanted to be a force multiplier," he says. "I wanted to take these park rangers and make them the equivalent of 20 park rangers."

The approach seemed effective. Working alongside local rangers, VETPAW managed to identify several poaching networks. Tate sums up their MO with a story. After rangers had apprehended a poacher, Tate came to have a talk. The suspect was a middleman, a guy who paid off local poachers with money from the larger syndicates that trafficked in the rhino horns. Tate saw an opportunity

VETPAW's conservation efforts include humanely removing the horns of some rhinos before poachers can get to them

As he had so many times in Iraq, he sat the man down and asked him if he had a wife or kids. is getting raided and gunshots are fired and women are screaming. These people have to live with that. That wore on me."

"Yeah, yeah, I have two daughters," the man said.

"You know what, man?" Tate said. "I know that you were just trying to provide for your children. I know that you've got to put food on the table."

The man nodded. Tate continued

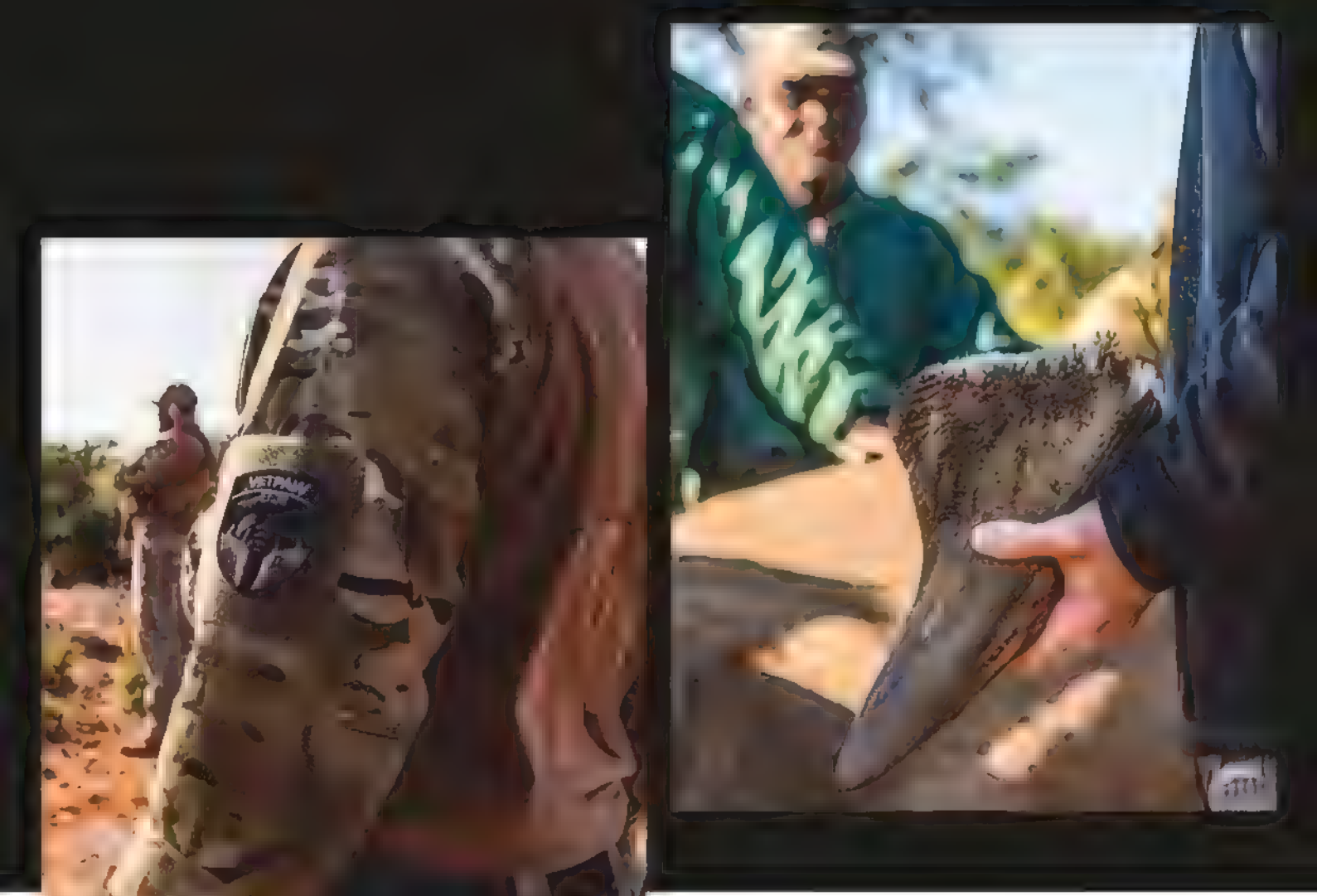
"But what you're actually doing by poaching these animals is you're destroying the heritage and the future of your community," Tate recalls saying. "If you don't have these animals, your community will crumble and criminals and terrorists will thrive in this region. What you're doing by providing for your kids in a dishonorable way is you're taking away their future. You're actually not providing for them."

The next day, Tate says, the man led the soldiers and rangers to the homes of several other poachers.

The reason rhinos are being slaughtered in Africa is almost as incomprehensible as the drop in their population. Already established in China, a booming market for rhino horn has opened in Southeast Asia. Folk doctors grind down the horn, which is virtually identical in substance to the human fingernail, and sell the powder as a treatment for cancer and erectile dysfunction. These presumed effects and the amount rhino horn can fetch on the black market—upward of R1,229,400.00 a kilogram, more than gold or cocaine—have transformed it into a status symbol for the growing middle class in countries like Vietnam. It is an appetite that underworld crime syndicates are more than happy to satisfy

But the Southeast Asian market represents only one of the threats to wildlife in Africa, which has seen tremendous declines in populations of elephants, giraffes, lions and other animals. Natural habitats are shrinking as the human population expands. Political corruption often undermines official antipoaching and conservation policies. Different countries employ differing approaches to conservation, with varying degrees of success, and a crowded nonprofit and NGO sector struggles to focus on a singular strategy. The wildlife crisis touches on many of Africa's other crises overpopulation, resource mismanagement, unproductive intrusion from well-meaning outsiders and deeply entrenched inequality that dates back to colonialism

This is the world Tate and his veterans entered when they started working with the government of Tanzania. Tate soon discovered it was a combustible environment. In early 2015, just before they set out on the mission, a now former member of Tate's team named Kinessa Johnson gave an interview at the National Shooting Sports Foundation's annual SHOT Show in Las Vegas in which she said she wanted to "kill some bad guys and do some good." When the interview surfaced online months later, the Tanzanian government asked VETPAW to leave the country.



Johnson's comments struck a nerve with governments and organizations concerned that the introduction of foreign military personnel would further militarize the poaching crisis, which had already seen increased activity of heavily armed poachers in places such as Kruger National Park. Ever since the experience in Tanzania, Tate has been focused on refining his model—tempering the "kick some ass" fantasies he'd nurtured a few years earlier. He found the preserve in South Africa essentially by going door-to-door, looking for landowners who would accept free security services in exchange for providing VETPAW a base of operations. (VETPAW pays its veterans by raising money, mostly from American donors.) The goal: to create antipoaching teams that do more than conduct raids and collect intelligence. Tate wants to offer monitoring, security and training services that can be easily adopted around the continent.

VETPAW's rangers typically rotate through three-month deployments; at any given time four to six veterans are on the ground. The soldiers' days are framed by morning and evening patrols and shifts with Niall Bedzer, an Irish expat who runs the preserve's rhino-monitoring program, helping him keep tabs on the movement of the herd. After nightfall, they head into the remote corners of the preserve, sometimes spending days camping out in the bush. They are there to monitor intruders but also to send a message. "We

> ***"In reality, when they're out here, they're not soldiers any more. They're conservationists."***

like to own the night," Tate says

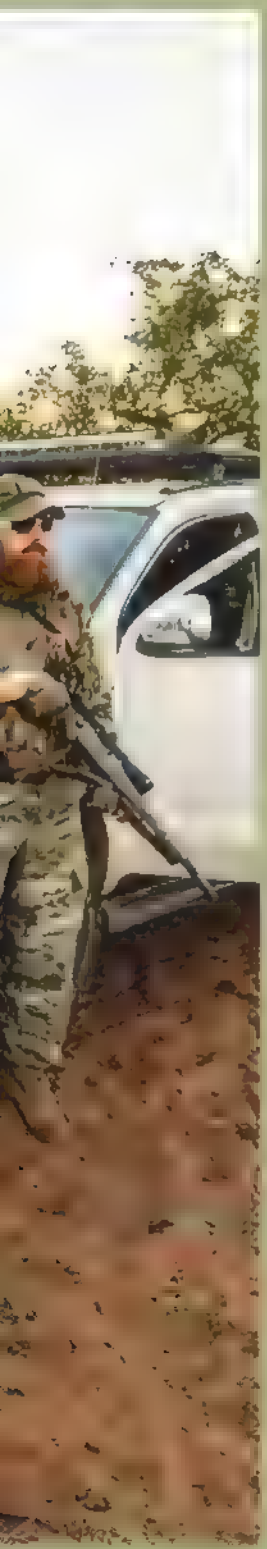
Team VETPAW lives in a small house fitted out like a stage set from M.A.S.H. Workout equipment is scattered around outside, and a hammock is strung between the branches of a massive baobab tree. Inside, the walls are covered with maps, whiteboards and signs warning of poisonous snakes.

Beyond the property's gates, the preserve is massive—two dusty, tree-dotted valleys that nearly span the horizon. Great journeys of giraffes, two herds of elephants and countless impalas, kudu, muskrats, wildebeests and water buffalo roam the landscape. Down the center, a spindly mountain ridge is dotted with the clay brick walls of ancient Venda tribal ruins. One evening, Bedzer takes me up the side of one of these ridges to a rock shelter a hundred feet above the valley floor. Standing up to our ankles in baboon droppings, we see the faint outline of a rhino painted on the limestone wall—evidence that the giant mammals have been roaming these lands for millennia.

During full moons, when the sky is bright enough to navigate without a flashlight or torch, the patrols increase in frequency and length. But when the moon is in its first phases, evening life revolves around the braai pit, where the vets, most in their late 20s and early 30s, sit around a roaring fire while fresh springbok meat roasts nearby. The conversation drifts from black-mamba sightings to lighthearted ribbing. During the week I spend with the team, Ben Powers, a former Army field sniper, takes most of the punishment, thanks to his constant Tinder messaging.

Watching the banter, I'm reminded that, as much as VETPAW is an antipoaching outfit, Tate's group is also serving another mission. The organization offers a way for these guys to recapture something of the camaraderie they knew during wartime, a less talked-about aspect of military withdrawal that can be just as demoralizing as the sudden drop in adrenaline. In this way, VETPAW is part of a growing number of organizations that are helping veterans via unconventional means—from Operation Surf, which teaches vets to ride the waves, to Force Blue, which employs them to help restore damaged coral reefs. According to a major RAND Corporation study, nearly 20 percent of Iraq and Afghanistan military vets suffer from PTSD or depression, and 19 percent suffer from traumatic brain injury—and yet as many as 50 percent of those diagnosed do not seek treatment. For vets who may not find their way to clinical care or whose recovery is long and slow with problems not so easy to diagnose, organizations like VETPAW offer a way to process the lingering hurt that is the quiet cost of service.

The sandy earth offers clues to the movements of the animals VETPAW seek to protect—and the humans hunting them.



"It's an empowerment thing for me, showing that these guys are more than just machines that go to war for the government and politics," Tate says. "The veteran skills that we're putting to use here, that's just one part of it."

The next day, I find Powers in camp, paging through a copy of Friedrich Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil. Life with VETPAW, Powers tells me, resembles deployment because of the regular patrols, the long hours in the field, the suiting up, the weapons and the communal life—but that's not all. Before he came to South Africa, he was working long hours for a steel-fabrication company, getting up at four A.M. for his commute and crashing into bed around nine or 10 at night.

"There was not a lot of time to spend working on myself," Powers says. "When on deployment, there's a lot of sitting around and learning how to utilize that time productively. That military community, that military lifestyle is what I missed."

In South Africa, Powers has something you can't find in therapy alone. He has time to read, work out and socialize with peers who know firsthand what it's like to have lived in a war zone. And unlike many other military contracting jobs, VETPAW offers an opportunity to recapture something of the military life on a mission that isn't, as Powers puts it, "gray."

"It is a pure kind of mission," he says.

Of course, no mission is 100 percent pure. The exile from Tanzania has left a mark on VETPAW that the organization still hasn't managed to shake. Several conservation organizations I reached out to either didn't respond to a request for comment or expressed reluctance to speak about VETPAW. One representative said off the record that he didn't want his name in an article associated with the group. The Game Rangers Association of Africa wouldn't speak to me about VETPAW but instead sent a five-page statement. Without naming names, it lists a variety of complaints about foreign ex-military entering the antipoaching sphere, including a lack of coordination and appreciation of cultural and political issues, and a tendency in the media to portray them as "the answer to Africa's poaching woes."

We are sitting around a firepit at VETPAW's camp when I present some of these concerns to Tate. He rests his elbows on his knees, as he often does when the conversation turns serious. He says that VETPAW has reached out to countless antipoaching organizations and government officials. Mostly he has found the various players standoffish and territorial. He tells a story about the manager of a nearby preserve, an Afrikaner, who refused VETPAW's offer to patrol his preserve for free. The Afrikaner bragged about how he had killed a poacher on his property and had the situation under control. A few weeks later, all but one of his rhinos were slaughtered.

Still, the lesson of Tanzania is not lost on Tate. VETPAW has changed the way it selects rangers, and this summer it conducted its first training and recruiting event in Arizona.

Over 10 days, veterans interested in joining up participated in a variety of training exercises, including role-playing scenarios designed to weed out hotheads.

"Just because you're Special Forces, Ricky Recon, Billy Badass, doesn't make you the perfect soldier for this," Tate says. "You're not in war. Even just a shot fired that doesn't hit anybody, those people are going to go tell the community, and then I got to answer to an elder. It can wreck everything. And certainly if you kill an innocent person, it's done."

Tate has also learned that success in this arena requires matching shows of force with acts of kindness. When VETPAW first arrived on the preserve, it was more common for nearby villagers to cross onto the land. Once, Tate received a call from one of his scouts that a suspected poacher was on the property. Tate went up in a helicopter with the game-preserve owner to track the intruder. They followed him all the way back to a village and brought the chopper down right in the man's front yard. It was a strong warning: There were new consequences for trespassing. A few weeks later, when the VETPAW team returned, they noticed the village well's water pump had broken. They came back and fixed it.

The specter of a jacked-up army implied by the Game Rangers Association's statement doesn't jibe with the VETPAW team members I meet on the ground. If anything, the organization resembles a Boy Scout camp for grown-ups. When they're not on antipoaching duty, the soldiers assist the preserve managers in running the property, capturing game, administering medicine to the elephants with the veterinarian, and feeding and monitoring the rhinos.

"In reality, when they're out here, they're not soldiers anymore," Tate says. "They're conservationists."

It's all part of Tate's ever-expanding vision for how his organization can not only save rhinos but also save veterans. He wants to add a garden near the barracks so vets suffering from severe PTSD can participate in horticultural therapy. He wants to expand VETPAW's footprint in Africa so more veterans can use their training for a good cause. To date, the group has been invited to set up a second base of operations at a private preserve in South Africa's Eastern Cape region. The team will include some who have experience running VETPAW's program and some new recruits. If all goes well, the new venture will demonstrate that the organization's success at protecting rhino herds, as well as its operational culture, will be replicable in any number of settings.

It is perhaps not surprising that while other antipoaching organizations have cast doubt on VETPAW, private preserve owners have taken note of its potential. VETPAW's approach reflects Tate's blunt, clear-headed style. The

Over one dramatic week, VETPAW teams up with local antipoaching forces to transport dozens of animals to other preserves

complications around the various bureaucracies of the counter-poaching world—from governments to NGOs to protective personalities—he sees as noise. VETPAW can avoid all of it by focusing on a simple mission, protecting the rhinos that are placed under their care.

"We're just focusing on doing the work here and doing a good job," Tate says. "We've never had a poaching incident anywhere we've worked. Everyone wants to be the person who saves the rhino. I could give two shits who saves it. Just save it."

At the end of the day, the only real evidence of an antipoaching organization's success is the health of the wildlife. Although for security reasons VETPAW can't say how many rhinos now live on the preserve, since the organization began operating here the herd has remained healthy and is growing.

Just as Tate's initial vision of VETPAW was tinged with G.I. Joe testosterone, my expectations of this trip borrowed heavily from war-movie tropes. But most of the action I see during my week with VETPAW is related to conservation, not confrontation. I watch the former grunts help the preserve managers conduct a game capture—a helicopter swinging back and forth across the bush, scaring kudu from the undergrowth and driving them miles across the property and straight into a set of massive green curtains, where hidden workers then herd the animals into the back of a truck. For a routine delivery of birth control to the elephant cows, the men spot the elephant herd and radio the preserve owner and the veterinarian, who swoop down in a helicopter and shoot medicine-filled darts into the scattering animals. "South Africans are the best helicopter pilots in the world," Tate says.

In a few weeks the vets will also participate in a dehorning. Rhino horns can be removed without harming the animals, and game managers have turned to this practice as a way of protecting them against poachers, who tend to shoot the animal and hack off its face, sometimes while the rhino is still alive.

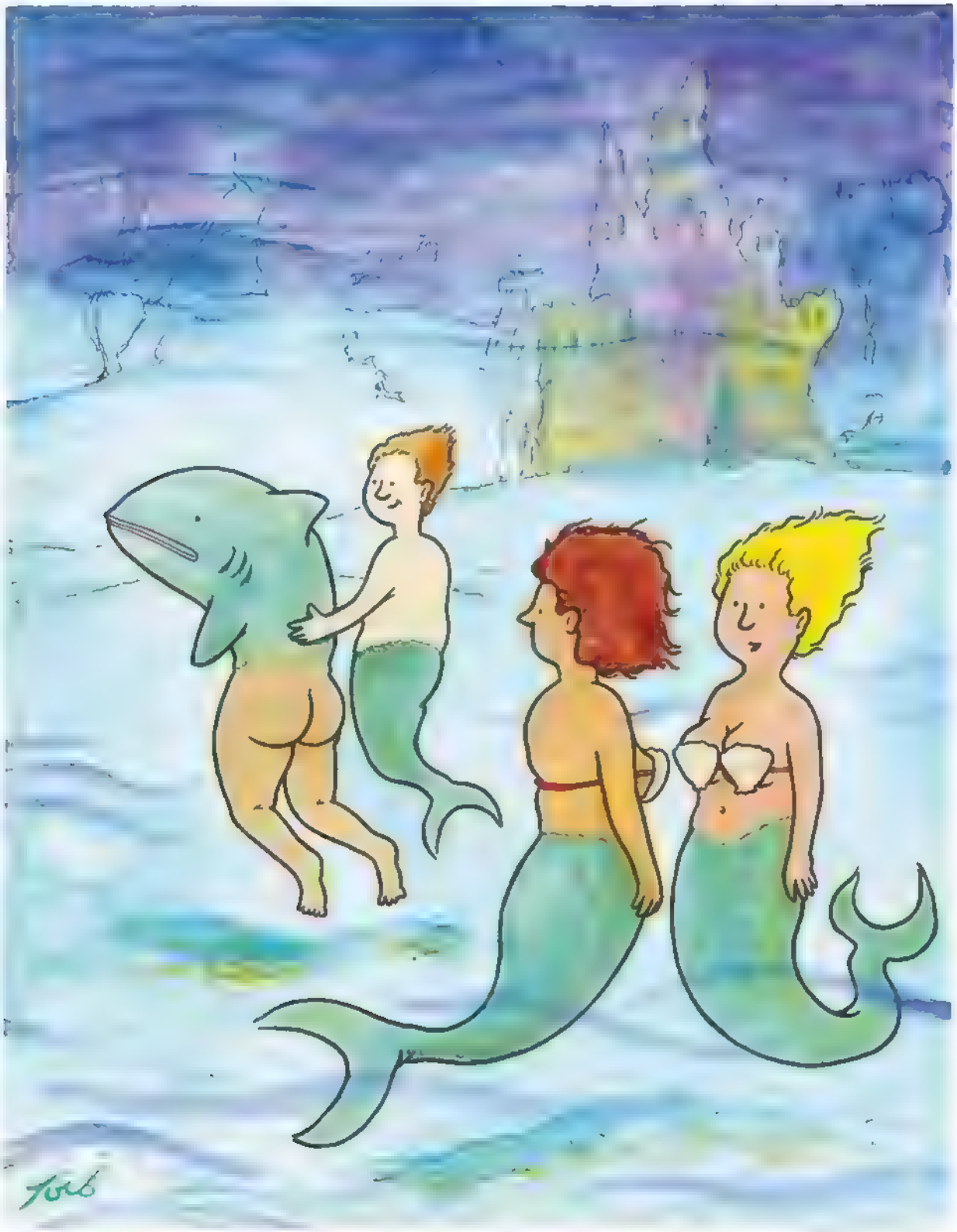
By the looks of it, that gruesome scene will not play out tonight on VETPAW's watch. Back in the bush on night patrol, we track the footprints into a thicket not far from the fence line. They could tell the story of an employee who simply forgot to wear the correct shoes to work. They could belong to a villager who hoped to catch a little bush meat to feed his family. Or they could be the imprints of a poacher. After following the tracks in a circle, Tate decides they will check with the preserve's foreman the following morning to see if any of his men showed up to work that day in the wrong shoes.

The moon is waxing. In a few weeks, when it is full, poachers will likely begin to sneak into the property once again. For now, the VETPAW team decides to take advantage of the quiet night and head in early. On the way back to camp, we pass a spotted owl perched on a fence post, glimpse some water buffalo in the shadows outside the headlights and dodge multiple herds of impala emitting their low-throated groans as the 4x4 rumbles by.

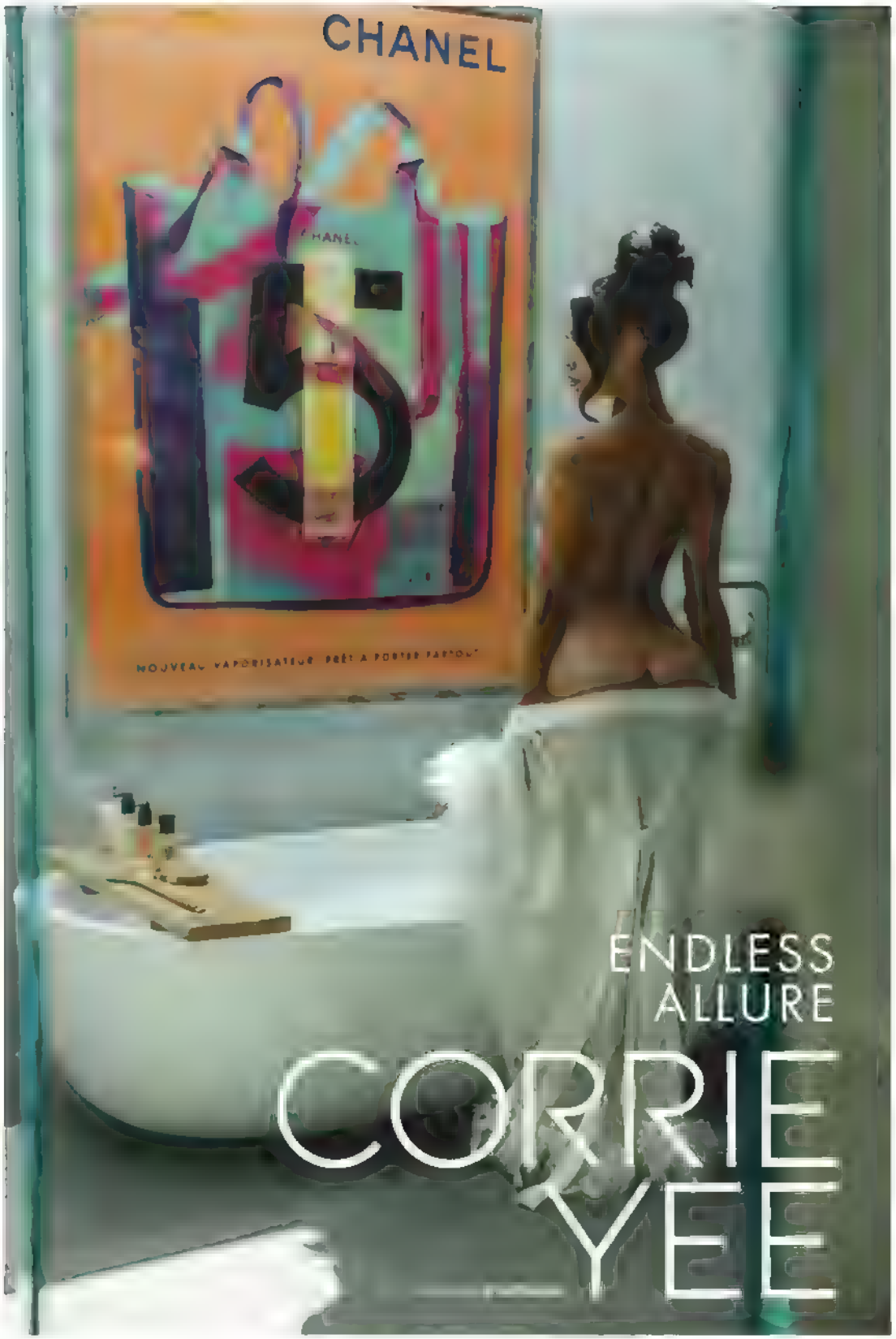
Then, as we approach the gate, our spotlights catch the soft gray outline of two female rhinos and a calf standing in a small clearing. We pause and watch. They are strange, primeval-looking beasts, hulking bodies affixed to stubby legs. It's difficult to discern what Darwinian advantage gave birth to their awkward form, so strong and yet so vulnerable. They crane their necks, dragging their R1,891,400.00 horns through a few bales of hay that have been left out for them to eat. One grunts and stomps her feet, kicking up dust. The calf jostles for position before the feed.

They are oblivious to the veterans in camouflage, who are now leaning out the windows of the nearby car, mouths agape in silent awe.

"If you're a fan of business, I think you're really going to enjoy pleasure."



"He's an ass man."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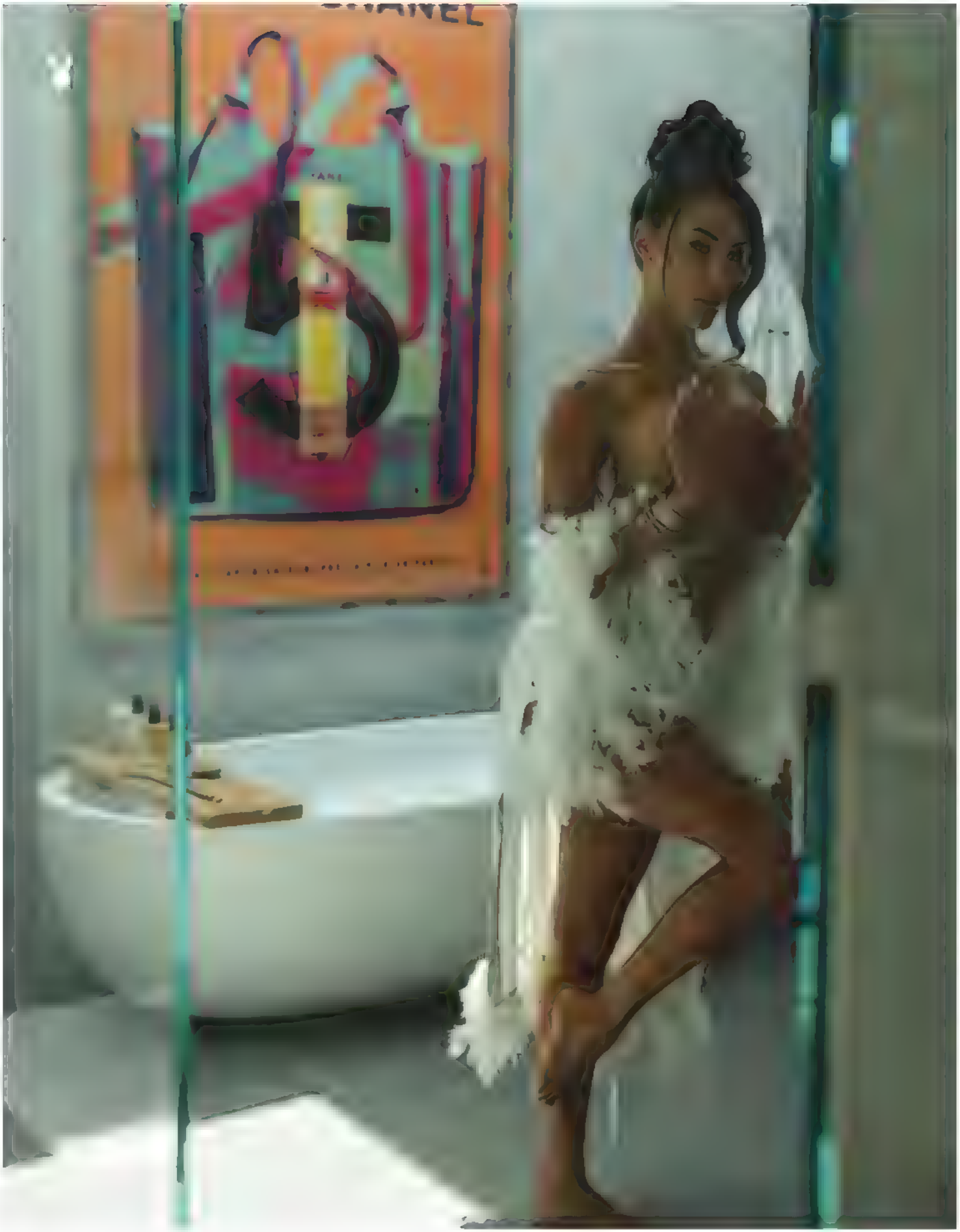
CHANEL

RTOUT.

We are happy to have you featured in Playboy! Can you give us a bit of background on your career and when it all started? I started modeling as a teenager. I did some prints and runway shows. Then one day it all changed when I had the opportunity to shoot with a well-known photographer from New York. I did a photoshoot with him and there was a domino effect from that experience, and offers began to pour in. My Instagram account grew quickly to over a million followers. Then, I moved to Los Angeles where I focused on modeling full-time.

Can you tell us about yourself? I grew up in a small town in New Mexico. I'm biracial - my father is Chinese and my mother is white. My dad worked as the county assessor and was also involved in the restaurant business, and my mom is a teacher. I have one older sister, and we are a small, close family. I have an artistic bent, and I like to paint, and I've always been interested in health and fitness.

What's one thing about yourself that your fans might be surprised to learn? I think my fans would be surprised to learn that I am a big nerd, a super chill person, and very approachable. I love meeting new people, and meeting my fans when I'm out and about and traveling. I enjoy cooking healthy meals at home, wearing comfy clothes, and watching shows like Lord of the Rings and animated films.

What are your favorite ways you like to unwind and relax when you are not working or traveling? I like to unwind by exercising. I go to the gym a lot and I enjoy weight training with my personal trainer, but I also like yoga and going on hikes. I like quiet evenings at home and curling up with a home-cooked meal and a good show on television.

If you could use one word to describe yourself, what would it be? I think it might be the word, "Driven." I like to live life unapologetically and stay true to myself. If I see something I want, I always go for it. I don't let any negative thinking or doubts hold me back from experiencing all that life has to offer. We only live once, so I believe it's important to have a spirit of adventure and embrace new experiences.

What are your future goals and aspirations? I understand that this career is not forever. My goals are to set myself up so that I can retire at a young age and help mentor other, young girls so they can do the same.

Are there any charities you are working with? Can you please tell us about them? I've worked with a variety of charity events - Babes in Toyland which has helped raise toys for disadvantaged children, and it also raises funds for veterans.

What does freedom of expression mean to you? Freedom of expression is a basic human right, an inalienable human right. It's our means of expressing who we are as individuals. The greatest expression of love, in my opinion, is to allow people to be exactly who they are and to be open and supportive of their individual expression.

What about those crazy DM's you must receive? Care to share a few funny stories regarding those? Yes, there are crazy DM's sometimes! It's difficult to choose because there are so many of them. I do get requests from women who want to "hang out." This happens quite often, and sometimes I do, "hang out with them."

Can you share any exciting upcoming projects or collaborations you're involved in? I have a lot of big publications coming out this year; however, I can't mention them at this time. I am happy to be on the cover of Playboy Australia 2024.

Thanks so much for your time. Where can our readers follow you on social media to stay updated on what you are up to? Instagram @corrieyee , TikTok: @the_corrieyee,Twitter: @Itscorrieyee @the_corrieyee, Facebook: Corrie Yee and Onlyfans: @corrieyee @corrieyeev.p.

PRÊT À PORTER PARTOUT

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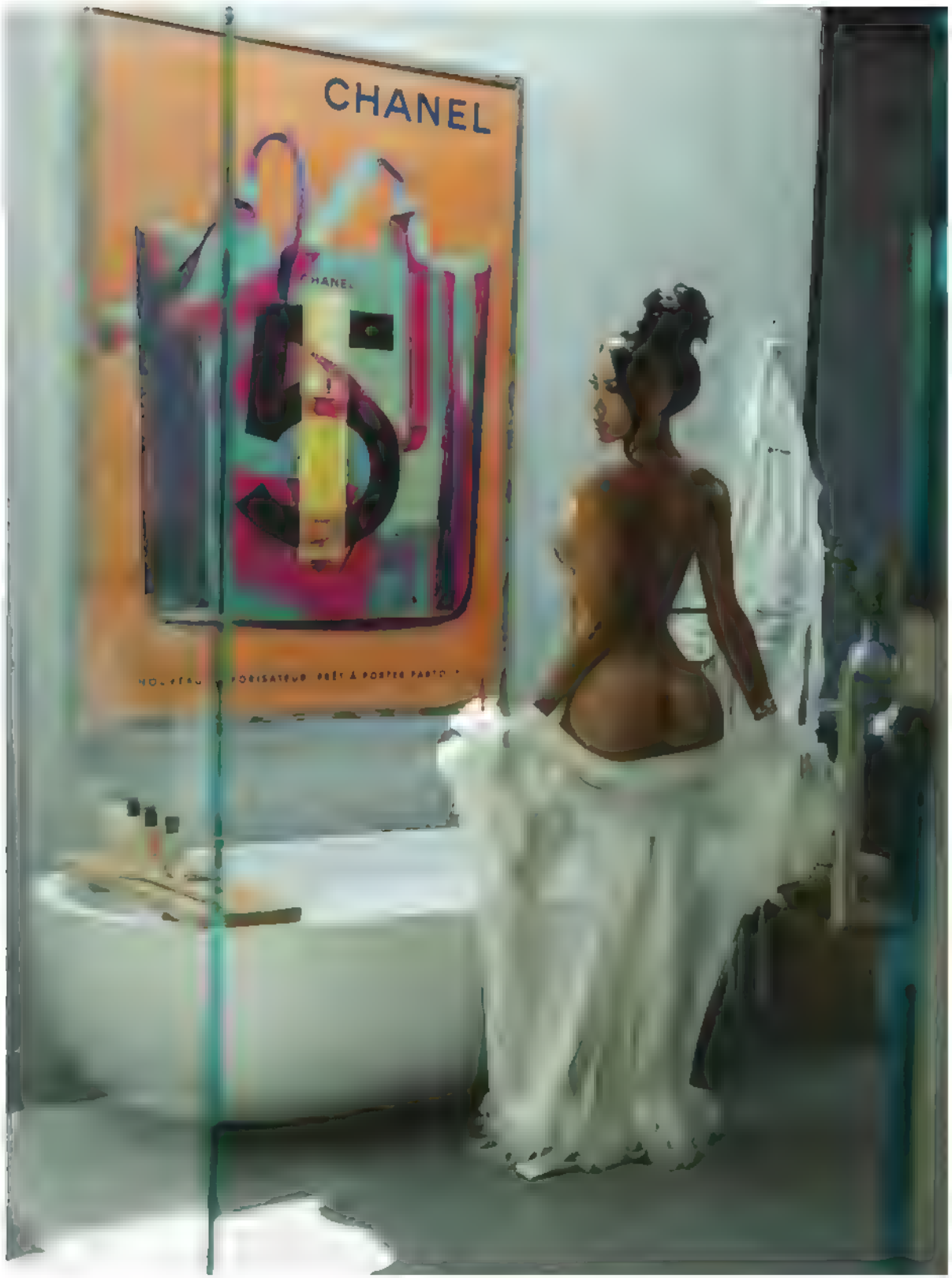
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PRÊT-À-PORTER PARTOUT

Free
the
Press

MARY MAPES

Imagine if the press in America were truly free—if journalism cost absolutely nothing to produce. What would reporting be like if it were unencumbered by the need to make profits, if a news operation's survival didn't depend on generating clicks, gunning up subscriptions or depositing asses in front of TVs?

What if our media were also free of the greed for power—free of a corporate owner's desire to please a politician whose actions could affect the company's bottom line, of reporters who ask only friendly questions in order to retain access to the highest levels of power, of newsroom workers who have fixed their compasses on moving up at the expense of making a difference?

The American news media is driven by the pursuit of money and power—not the truth. Mary Mapes says it has to be fixed.

Would our stories be more aggressive and our questioning of politicians, of all stripes, more adversarial? Would more whistle-blowers be willing to step forward? Would newsrooms be more inclined to launch risky investigations, tackle difficult subjects and take on projects that require more time, manpower and money than they're able to commit now?

We all know the answers

When I became a journalist, I didn't do it because I wanted to get rich quick, or even slowly. I did it because I believed I was joining a kind of church, a cult that worshipped curiosity and the First Amendment, whose members believed we were performing a public service integral to our way of life. We were there to represent all Americans, to be their eyes and ears, and to bring back to them the gritty details of how government really worked, how our leaders behaved behind closed doors and how our tax dollars were used.

"If our media universe were a restaurant, American news consumers would be undernourished."

That is what I believed profoundly when I took my job at CBS News in 1989. I lost that job almost 16 years later in a political firestorm triggered by corporate fear and partisan political attacks after Dan Rather and I broadcast a challenging 60 Minutes II story about the sketchy military record of then president George W. Bush.

What I didn't realize when we aired that story was that in the years between my first day at CBS and the day I was asked to leave the building and never come back, our media models had devolved into something much less than a fully free press. They'd become profit-first businesses built on the belief that freedom of the press simply wasn't worth the cost. That thinking has been behind the decades-long drive of corporate owners to cut corners in news coverage, lay off a generation of reporters and shutter news outlets that weren't meeting unrealistically high profit margins. At some point, profitability and the First Amendment became mutually exclusive.

Once upon a time, we had very few outlets for news and information. Now, though we seem to have more choices, it's a digital delusion. In 1983, 50 companies controlled 90 percent of our media. Over the next three decades, the Federal Communications Commission relaxed or eliminated multiple rules limiting media ownership. Today, thanks to consolidation, mega-mergers, hostile takeovers and financial hard times, the number of controlling companies is down to six. And those six companies—Comcast, Walt Disney, News Corp., Time Warner, Viacom and CBS—have made callow choices about what Americans should be able to see and learn about the world around us.

If our media universe were a restaurant, American news consumers would be undernourished. We exist on a steady diet of intellectual junk food—cotton candy, Cheez Whiz and chicken wings—with an occasional hunk of raw red meat thrown into the mix. Like children whose every meal is delivered through a car window, we're getting exactly what media executives think we want, not what they know we need—and not what we deserve.

That's why a blustering reality-TV star has seemed to so many Americans a viable candidate to lead the country. And the media has facilitated Donald Trump, the Honey Boo Boo of Campaign 2016, by giving him free, unfiltered access to American audiences—not because he's brilliant but because he's ratings gold.

It's not as easy as it used to be to stay informed, but it's more important than ever before. That leaves the onus on American citizens to curate our own coverage, to serve as our own editors in compiling a go-to list of news sites, newspapers and television programs. We have to read international news and consider analysis from people with whom we fundamentally disagree. We have to try new things, such as journalistic start-ups that operate as nonprofits. We have to protect whistle-blowers, support websites and editors that rail against the status quo and champion reporters who regularly earn the wrath of the rich and powerful.

We all know the future of our news media is digital, but we aren't there yet—not by a long shot. We're still chimps in command of a jumbo-jet cockpit, thrilled to be along for the ride but not quite sure where we're going or how to get there.

We can use our desktops as windows into the universe, our laptops to learn about the world and our smartphones to access the wisdom of the ages—or we can use them to take pictures of our genitals and text them to one another.

Maybe it's time we stopped dicking around.

Mary Mapes is a journalist, author and Peabody award-winning television news producer.

Freedom of press

Living In
Your Own
Not-So-
Private
Bubble

It's said that information wants to be free—that, like life, it will find a way to replicate itself and show up where you least expect or want it. Your information now has more ways than ever before to spread, from online backups to the private messages your ex-girlfriend archived. But I can tell you this: My information absolutely does not want to be free. It wants to stay home and go out and play only when I give it permission.

Corporations are using vast stores of your personal data to reshape your every moment. And, as Jeff Moss argues, you're letting it happen

Storage space costs next to nothing, and everything you do is recorded forever. That porn site you visited is not just in your browser history; it's also in the logs of your internet service provider, the DNS server, the content-distribution network, the ad network the site uses, Google Analytics and finally on the actual site you visited. Clearing your browser history only hides it from whoever else uses your devices. If I want to browse the internet, my information has to go out and play, whether I like it or not.

It's also said that we live in the "golden age of surveillance." Simply put, surveillance is when an intelligence or law enforcement agency listens in and records traffic, be it voice, data, telemetry, radio, whatever. This is what Edward Snowden revealed.

If we're talking freedom, though, I worry most about the collection that companies do on us. Have a mobile phone? Your location data is shared with "partners." Same with your medical records, home-loan finances, social media pictures. Use any apps that have access to your address book? They just backed it up "for reference purposes."

This is society's cost of entry today. Companies must monetize everything about you to help fund their services—services we see as essential to participating in modern society. I can't pay Facebook $1,900.00 a year not to collect info about me; its platform doesn't work that way. In a Möbius strip of data, we're both the product and the consumer. Think you have a right to privacy? To paraphrase President Obama, "You don't own that." You just gave it away in the terms of service you didn't read.

The amount of data that companies have about you individually may not be much, but when data brokers aggregate hundreds of companies' collections, it ends up being way more detailed than what the NSA knows about you. These giant pools are used by advertisers, insurance companies, market researchers...basically anyone who can pay.

Going shopping? Malls, supermarkets and outdoor advertisers collect the MAC (media access control) addresses that your phone broadcasts and use them to track where you go and how long you stand in front of the cookies. It helps businesses optimize their inventory if they know where people linger. Don't like this? Don't use a Bluetooth headset, and turn off wi-fi.

It gets worse. Way worse. When the internet of things arrives, add to this list all the data your IOT devices will have on you: the shows, games and songs you enjoy, when you're home or away, how much energy you use compared with your neighbors, the food you prepare, where and when you drive, your health stats. Talk about your quantified self!

Marketers work hard to put you in a bubble. With their ever-increasing understanding of your behavior and preferences, one of their end goals is to influence you at just the right moment with just the right offer. The more they can influence what you read or watch, the better they can do this.

Your bubble will be personalized to your tastes, like a constant mash-up of Amazon, Netflix and Facebook recommendations. It will steer you toward news stories and articles you're likely to agree with and enjoy (while viewing all the ads along the way). Your bubble will give you just the right amount of new discovery excitement along with your daily favorites while sharing only that which is in-network. Your bubble will be different from those of your friends, neighbors and bosses. In other words, your bubble will be an all-encompassing field of personalized content enabled by compulsory mass corporate surveillance.

Government didn't do this to us. The free market did. It costs nothing for an app developer or a company to add a terms-of-service clause giving it permission to collect your information. And all that data is such an attractive nuisance! The perverse thing is that spy agencies and prosecutors don't need to collect anymore, what they can't subpoena, they just buy.

What does freedom even mean in this context? The current debate about NSA bulk collection is important, but it's a sideshow to what's really happening to our privacy and freedoms in a connected world. That will become clear when a whistle-blower of Snowden's caliber emerges from Facebook, Google or some other company that makes it their business to collect on all of us.

"Think you have a right to privacy? You just gave it away in the terms of service you didn't read."

Cybersecurity expert Jeff Moss, a.k.a. the Dark Tangent, is founder of the event series Black Hat and the global hacker conference DEF CON.

The New Drug War

PETERSON

A lot has changed in the drug trade since the 1980s, when I went undercover for the Drug Enforcement Administration, infiltrating the top echelons of Colombia's drug cartels and helping bring down money-laundering bankers. Back then, the Medellín cartel had a network of operatives that distributed cocaine shipments to wholesale buyers in the United States. Mexico was simply a transshipment point where commercial jets laden with huge cargoes of cocaine were safely off-loaded. The Colombians gave Mexican cartel operatives and corrupt military personnel as much as 20 percent of the shipments in exchange for the use of military bases and other airstrips for secure landing and storage. The remaining 80 percent was moved into the U.S. and sold through a network of Colombian distributors operating there.

Dirty banks still enable the global drug trade. Former Federal agent and author Robert Mazur, whose book 'The Infiltrator' spawned the new movie of the same name, insists the battle must move from the streets to the boardroom

These days, Colombian cartels sell much of their cocaine directly to Mexican cartels, which then take the bulk of the risk, distributing the drug in the U.S. with the help of gangs entrenched in our cities. Meanwhile, terrorist groups including Hezbollah and Hamas have been clearly shown to work with the cartels in global cocaine trafficking and money laundering.

A lot has stayed the same too. We still face the inconvenient truth that portions of the international banking and business communities service the underworld by transforming mountains of ill-gotten cash into legitimate-appearing assets. These bankers and businessmen rob people around the world of their freedom by enabling criminal organizations to create a veil of legitimacy around dirty fortunes that are used to corrupt everything from families to governments. In order to influence politicians, prosecutors, judges, cops and even armies, the cartels rely on their ability to enrich people in clandestine ways. They can't walk into a politician's office and plop a duffel bag full of cash onto the desk, but if that cash is moved into a bank that extends a "legitimate" loan to a company the politician controls, no one is the wiser. In the past seven years, more than a dozen banks, some based in the U.S., have admitted to criminal offenses in connection with the movement of dirty money, including laundering drug proceeds.

Segments of the banking and business communities market underworld money because there is little likelihood they'll get caught and the profits are very high. U.S. law enforcement authorities identify and seize less than one percent of the annual R7,500.00 billion in illegal drug proceeds earned globally, professional money launderers can make as much as 20 percent of a criminal's fortune. The only thing that will turn this around is a real fear in the hearts and minds of launderers that their conduct will land them behind bars for the better part of the rest of their lives. As it stands now, the law enforcement world does not invest the resources or brainpower needed to identify and prosecute money launderers. Most criminal prosecutions for money laundering are developed secondarily when cops prove someone committed some other crime and conducted a transaction with tainted funds.

So what can we do to make the world safer and more free? For starters, we have to find a formula that will reduce demand – our insatiable appetite for illegal drugs is the fuel that keeps the cartel engines running—and make education and economic opportunity available to the less fortunate so they have a real path of hope that's resistant to the lure of drugs.

On a global level, we need an aggressive plan to identify and prosecute those who service the underworld—a plan to change the failed corporate culture that has produced money launderers within the international banking and business communities. We need a multiagency, multi-national task force with the sole responsibility of identifying the world's top money-laundering threats. This task force would become the entity with primary jurisdiction for prosecuting money-laundering cases, just as the DEA is now the primary agency recognized for prosecuting drug cases and the U.S. Secret Service is known for handling currency-counterfeiting cases.

Finally, we must accept that drug cartels do far more than simply make illegal drugs available worldwide. Their most dangerous product is corruption. They buy significant influence within governments through payoffs, they ruthlessly murder, and they steal freedom from virtually anyone in their path. People in Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Venezuela, nations in sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the world experience this death and destruction every day. Even our own country is no stranger to cartel-bred violence: The bloodshed within our borders caused by illegal drugs is at epidemic proportions.

Clearly, the way we're fighting this war is not working.

Robert Mazur, author of The Infiltrator and subject of the movie of the same name, was a federal agent for 27 years, many of them spent investigating international money-laundering cases

"We still face the inconvenient truth that portions of the interna tional banking and business com munities service the underworld."

REWRITING
THE RULES

Mayra Dias Gomes

Instagram **@maryadiasgomes**

Photography by **Karl Larsen** Makeup **Hamest Margaryan**
Hair & Styling **Michelle Nava** Location **Vibrancy Lab**

Mayra, welcome back to Playboy! You graced the cover of Playboy Denmark in February 2023, and now you're on the cover of Playboy Finland. How has your life changed since then? I'm so happy to be back! Being on the cover of Playboy Denmark was a dream come true and a pivotal moment in my career. It opened doors I had only dreamed of in modeling, writing, hosting, and public speaking. Most importantly, Playboy provided a platform for me to share my personal growth journey, allowing me to inspire and support others on their paths.

We've heard you've visited Finland several times. Can you tell us about your experiences there? Absolutely! I've had the pleasure of visiting Finland multiple times. My first trip was when I was 19, working as a journalist for Brazil's largest newspaper. I was invited by the Finnish consulate to Helsinki to interview metal bands and promote them back in Brazil. Since then, I've made many friends in Finland and have fallen in love with numerous Finnish rock and roll bands. Hanoi Rocks, HIM and the 69 Eyes are some of my favorite bands and very close friends. I love Finnish music, and how rock'n'roll the culture is.

You've been on quite a journey, from a celebrated cover girl to an advocate for mental health. How did this path begin? What sparked my advocacy for mental health was my own personal journey. I've experienced my share of struggles and learned so much about resilience, self-worth, and the importance of mental health. It's been incredibly fulfilling to use my platform to make a positive impact.

What does it mean to heal? Healing isn't just about addressing past traumas, it's about preparing ourselves to embrace happiness when it comes our way.

Can you share a personal experience where you felt you sabotaged your own happiness? It's something I've experienced firsthand. Imagine being on a date with someone who is genuinely kind, attentive, respectful and available. Instead of enjoying the moment, I found myself questioning his intentions—wondering if he was manipulating me, love-bombing, or playing me. The inability to trust and feel comfortable in that scenario made me realize I had a lot of work to do.

What do you look for in a man? I'm drawn to men who are creative, adventurous, charming, confident, and charismatic. I adore deep connections. I want someone exciting and inspiring who can keep up with my adventurous spirit, but also provide me stability and safety.

Have you ever had a secret relationship? Yes, I've had relationships that were kept out of the public eye. Managing a relationship is hard enough privately, and the added stress of public scrutiny can complicate things even more, especially with public figures. Most of my relationships over the past few years have been kept off social media. It has helped preserve them.

Have you ever had a relationship go wrong because of social media? I have. Unless I trust and have total clarity in the nature of the relationship, posting someone online can be like advertising them to a really large network. The added scrutiny and opinions can complicate things.

What message do you hope to share with your readers through Playboy Finland? I want to inspire others to embrace their own journeys of self-discovery. By sharing my story and my work, I hope to inspire others to celebrate their individuality. As a multi-faceted woman who is a writer, journalist, wrestling broadcaster, and model, I strive to send the message that you can explore different sides of your personality and express yourself authentically, despite the labels people might try to put on you.

How do you handle the stigma associated with being a Playboy model? It's an opportunity to challenge stereotypes? I use my platform to showcase that women can be sexy, smart, and successful, breaking down outdated notions about what it means to pose for Playboy.

Given your extensive travels and experiences, what cultural differences have you noticed in the perception of Playboy and its models? Each country has its own unique perspective on Playboy models. In some places, it's seen as a celebration of beauty and confidence, while in others, there are still taboos. I've found that regardless of the cultural differences, there's an appreciation for the empowerment and aesthetics that an iconic brand like Playboy represents.

You've mentioned the butterfly as a profound symbol in your journey. Can you tell us more about its significance? The butterfly has always symbolized transformation for me. My first tattoo as a teenager was a butterfly, representing my desire for change and my love for my friend Shifty, who just recently passed away. Recently, butterflies have reappeared in my life, reminding me of the beauty in transformation and rebirth.

What advice would you give your teenage self?

I would tell my teenage self not to feel so anxious, lost or inadequate. I know how stuck and unloved you feel right now, but you're on a journey of self-discovery. Have faith in your determination, because you're going to move to Hollywood, make your dreams come true, have the relationships you've always wished for, and work in the jobs you've fantasized about. The amazing life that seems impossible now will become your reality. Hold on to hope and believe in your potential, because the journey ahead, though challenging, will lead you to an incredibly fulfilling life.

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Culture Warrior: On the Frontlines with Bill Nye

MARIA PETRUSICH

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEREMY LIEBMAN FOR

His career in entertainment may have started with a Steve Martin look-alike contest, but this Science Guy has become one of the bravest soldiers in the fight for rationalism. Meet the brains behind the bow tie

Bill Nye does not abide casual misuse of the word incredible. If you refer to some sophisticated scientific process in this way—the creation of more-durable crops through genetic modification, say—he will correct you, firmly. "No, it's credible. It's science."

Anyone who came of age in the United States in the early 1990s through the early 2000s can likely credit Nye with their understanding of one natural phenomenon or another. He has been dutifully demonstrating the scientific method to television viewers for more than 30 years, either as the host of one of several shows or as a bow-tied talking head debating a cable-news pundit. His television career started when he joined the staff of Almost Live!, a Seattle sketch comedy show, in 1986, and took off with Bill Nye the Science Guy, an educational children's show that aired from 1993 to 1998 on KCTS-TV, Seattle's public broadcasting station, and was syndicated nationally via PBS. On the show, Nye would scramble about the set in a baby-blue lab coat, meticulously breaking down topics including biodiversity, space travel, gravity, animal locomotion and pollution, usually through such antics as hurling a desktop computer off the roof of his studio or pretending to be buried by an avalanche of trash.

Bill Nye the Science Guy won 19 Emmy awards and was followed by another PBS series, The Eyes of Nye, and several books. The latest, Everything All at Once: How to Unleash Your Inner Nerd, Tap Into Radical Curiosity and Solve Any Problem, is out July 11. In April, Nye debuted a new Netflix series, Bill Nye Saves the World, which features a rotating cast of celebrity accomplices—including, in its very first segment, supermodel Karlie Kloss and rapper Desiigner—and is aimed more toward edifying adults than toward educating kids, though this does not preclude moments of supreme goofiness. Nye cites both Steve Martin and Carl Sagan as early influences.

"Science came first, without question," he says. We're drinking coffee in a hotel suite in midtown Manhattan while the city is in the midst of a colossal downpour. "But ever since I was a kid, I've wanted to be funny. It was valued."

Nye was born in Bethesda, Maryland, in 1955. His mother was a code breaker for the Navy during World War II, and his father worked in advertising. After graduating from Sidwell Friends—a prestigious private school popular with presidential offspring from Archibald Roosevelt to Sasha and Malia Obama—he enrolled at Cornell, where he earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering. It wasn't until later, after friends had cajoled him into entering a Steve Martin look-alike contest

"There are people running around who think the earth is flat. No, it's not flat. Look at the pictures, dude."

(he won), that he became interested in comedy.

He still gets defensive about his academic bona fides. In 2016 Sarah Palin disparaged Nye at a screening of Climate Hustle, a film that questions the accuracy of climate science. "He's a kids' show actor; he's not a scientist," she said. As chilling as it is to admit, Palin wasn't wrong. Nye never went to graduate school, nor has he ever held a job in a lab. In other areas, this sort of institutional validation wouldn't matter—nobody cares whether Jimi Hendrix had a master's degree in composition—but in an academic discipline, it's significant.

"Mechanical engineering is nothing but science," Nye tells me. "That's all it is. I took six semesters of calculus. Is that enough? I studied fluid mechanics, heat transfer, the design of mechanical components. So, deal."

Nye will tersely defend his scientific qualifications, but in some ways his background as a comedian is his greatest asset. These days, intellectualism of any sort is often read as snobbery, a luxury of the so-called coastal elite. It makes sense that the country would turn to a beloved celebrity for help with a complex public issue like climate change. And our greatest scientific thinkers,

though overloaded with degrees, are likely not as quick with a quip or as willing to use physical comedy to illustrate the laws of nature

Given all that, Nye may seem an unlikely lightning rod for controversy. He advocates only for established scientific beliefs, not fringe theories. But he has detractors, some of them vocal, many of them online. "Everywhere I go, people will say, 'Wow, thank you for your work. You're doing a great job.' But when I look on the electric internet, there are a few people who just hate me," Nye says. "I mean, I get involved in debates on purpose."

A popular video on YouTube called "Those 7 Times Bill Nye Went Beast Mode" contains, despite its title, mostly footage of Nye responding calmly and carefully to increasingly hysterical accusations. Trying to understand popular skepticism in the face of objectively provable facts could drive a less durable man insane. In this, though, Nye is indefatigable. American culture has arguably never been more resistant to empiricism or more confused about what objective truth looks like. "There are people running around who think the Earth is flat," he says. "I thought it was a joke at first. No, it's not flat. No, you can see—look at the pictures, dude." He appears worried.

"In my life, science has never before been set aside like this."

The next time I see Nye is in Montclair, New Jersey, a moneyed suburb about 15 miles west of Manhattan. Bill Nye, Science Guy, a recent documentary about his life and work, is screening at the Montclair Film Festival, and Nye is there to participate in a post-screening Q&A with Stephen Colbert, Montclair's most famous resident.

Before the screening, I chat with the security guard manning the backstage entrance. He has a wispy postadolescent mustache and is waving around one of those metal-detection

wands. "I want to get a picture," he says. "I've been watching Bill since pre-K." Outside the theater, lined up on the sidewalk, I see a teenager wearing a T-shirt with the periodic table on the front, several children in lab coats and what appears to be a formidable collection of high school science teachers. People are waiting outside in the rain.

Nye arrives at the theater on time, scurrying from the backseat of a dark SUV toward the venue. When I greet him by the door, right away he asks me how his bow tie looks. Nye inquires after his bow tie a lot. "It's very important," he says.

Nye also remembers the name of every single person he meets, even if he's being introduced to a whole roomful of new faces at once. He is gently irritated by bullshit—when I dopily tell him his tie looks "amazing!" he gives me a look like, Come on—and prefers that hangers-on keep up with his hyperkinetic pace. He says the word dude a lot—more specifically, "Dude!" immediately followed by a quieter and more censorious "Dude." If you provoke a "Dude! Dude" you will immediately regret your entire approach.

Montclair's Wellmont Theater has a seating capacity of about 1,800, and I've been told the event is "wildly sold out." Colbert and Nye meet up before the screening, in the makeup room. The previous day, Nye taped a segment for The Late Show, to air the following Monday. "You're just nailing it, man," Nye tells Colbert as a makeup artist applies powder. "And of course, you have so much to work with."

"Almost too much," Colbert replies. Colbert is a devout Catholic, and Nye is agnostic, but the two seem to have an instinctive rapport.

Nye watches the film seated near Colbert. It's a revealing portrait. Nye has never legally married or had children (he joked to me about his inability to commit to a woman), and he frets about staving off ataxia, a movement disorder characterized by a lack of muscle control. Both of his siblings have been diagnosed with the condition, which can be caused by a defective gene.

Midway through, when footage of Ark Encounter—the controversial creationist theme park in northern Kentucky run by the apologetics ministry Answers in Genesis and infamously subsidized by the state—appears onscreen, a little boy of around six seated directly behind me yells, "That looks fun!" The boy's parents frantically shush him. No doubt they've seen Nye's 2014 debate with Answers in Genesis president Ken Ham at the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky. At one point in the debate, the moderator, Tom Foreman, asked both men, "What, if anything, would ever change your mind?" The moment immediately felt demonstrative of something larger, more fundamental. Ham was flummoxed by the question. "I'm a Christian," he said. "As far as the word of God is concerned, no, no one is ever going to convince me that the word of God is not true." Nye allowed that his mind could easily be changed. "We would just need one piece of evidence," he said.

Back in Montclair, during the talk-back, Colbert recites an Isaac Asimov passage from "A Cult of Ignorance," an essay Asimov wrote for Newsweek in 1980. "There is a cult of ignorance in the United States, and there has always been. The strain of anti-intellectualism has been a constant thread winding its way through our political and cultural life, nurtured by the false notion that democracy means that 'my ignorance is just as good as your knowledge.'" The crowd applauds. "If the majority is always right," Colbert asks, "even if the majority believes something that isn't true, how does science approach that?"

"We just try to show the facts as often as we can," Nye says.

In Bill Nye: Science Guy, interviews with some of Nye's early colleagues suggest that Nye has always wanted to be famous—that he courts attention. Because he was a fixture of so many American childhoods (in the 1990s, nearly every exhausted science teacher in the U.S. wheeled in a VCR and played an episode of Bill Nye the Science Guy on at least one occasion), he has an uncommon bipartisan appeal. He possibly endangers that appeal every time he appears on another conservative talk show and is forced to position himself as part of the resistance rather than as an apolitical public thinker. Still, Nye repeats the virtues of science so tirelessly, it's hard to question his intentions.

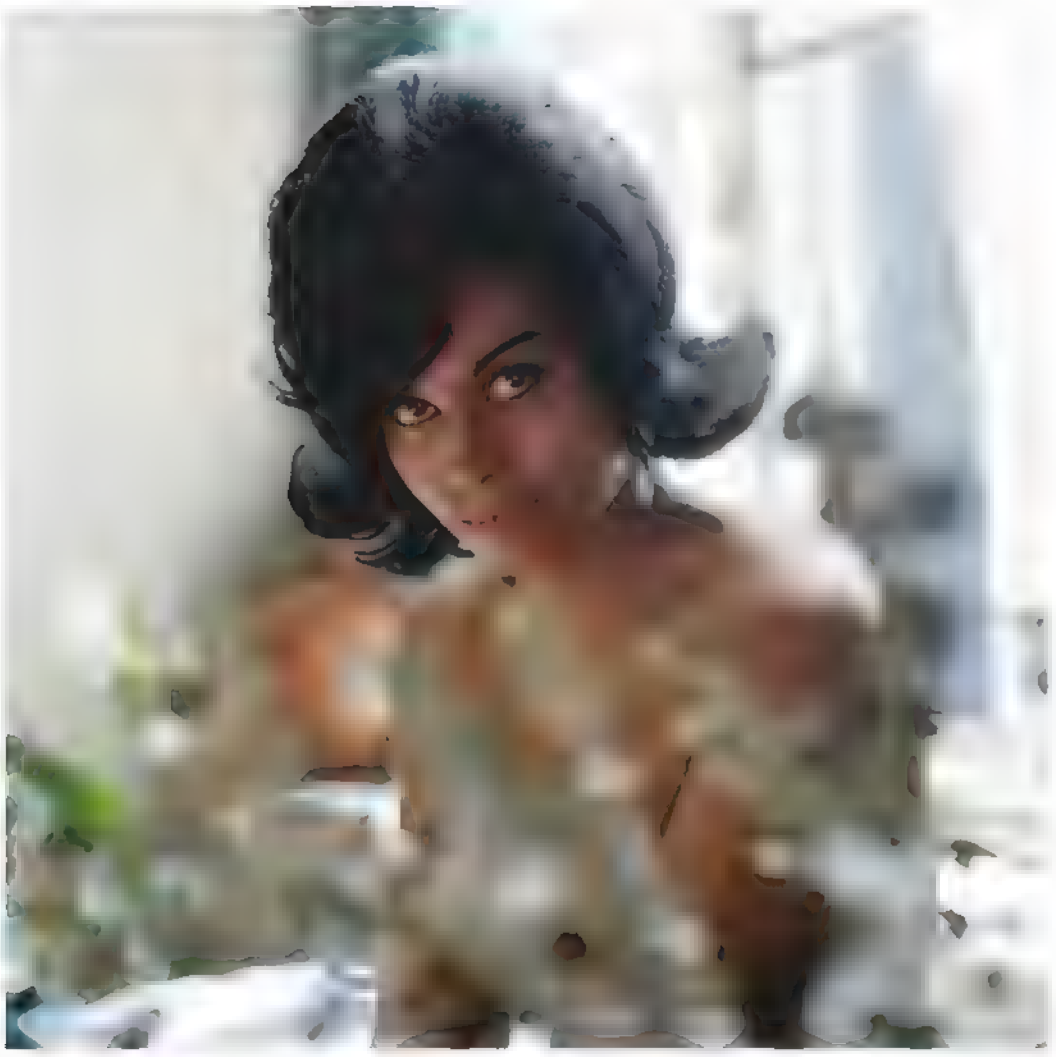
After the event, I come upon him in the green room, lecturing a clump of grinning acolytes about the efficacy of solar panels. I'm struck, again, by the consistency of Nye's vision. He appears to care chiefly, if not exclusively, about just two things: leaving the world better than he found it (an aphorism he learned from his father) and responsibly educating as many people as he can. He seems to believe that if he talks frequently enough, and loudly enough, about what's at stake for the world, his message will eventually change some minds. This is how he justifies all those cable-news appearances.

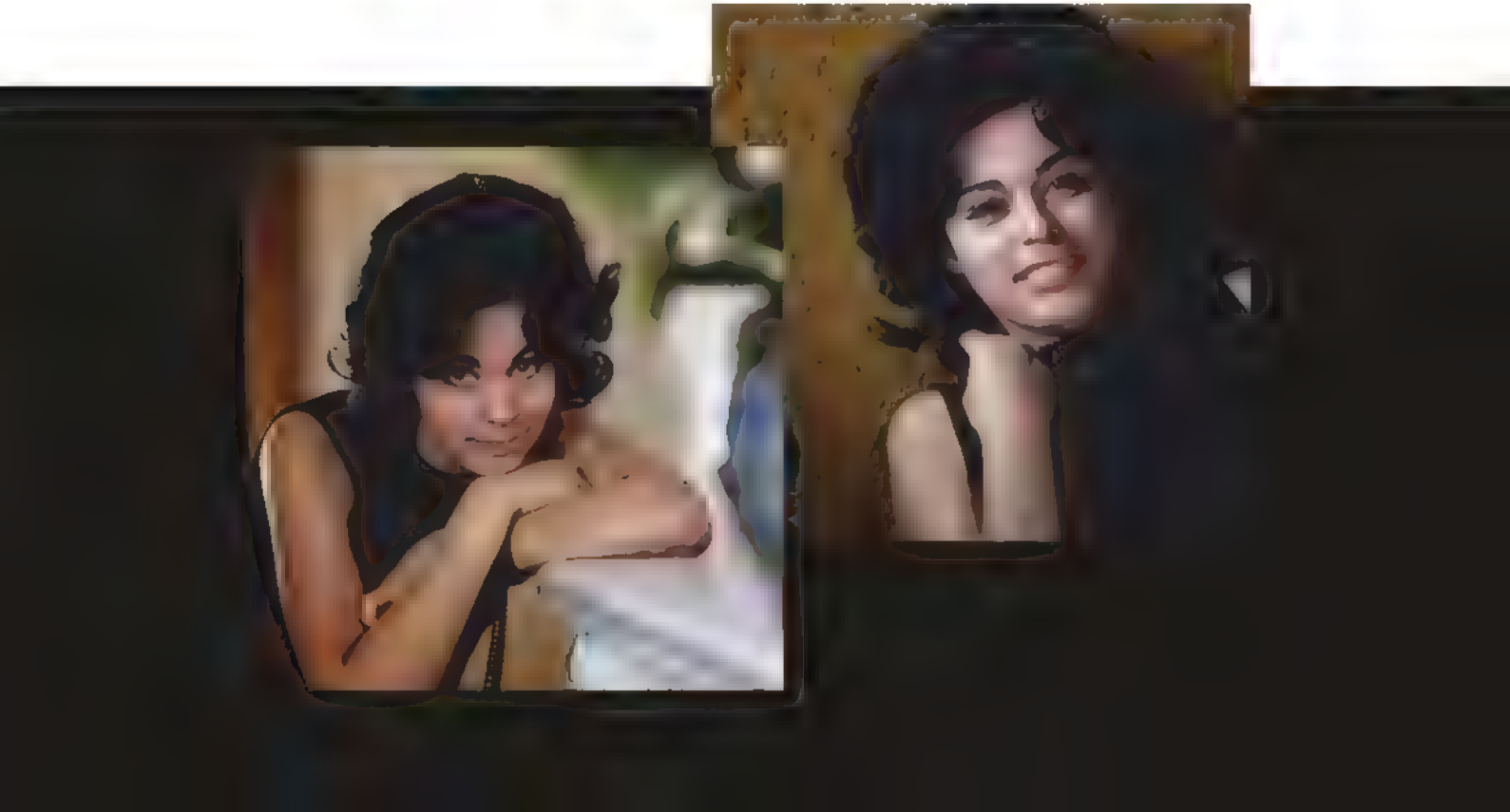
Colbert walks a young friend in a bow tie over for an introduction, and Nye launches into a quick lesson on how to properly stage a selfie. He has an educator's instinct and a clawlike grip on an iPhone. (He makes a little "Blagh!" sound right before snapping the shutter, "to get people laughing.")

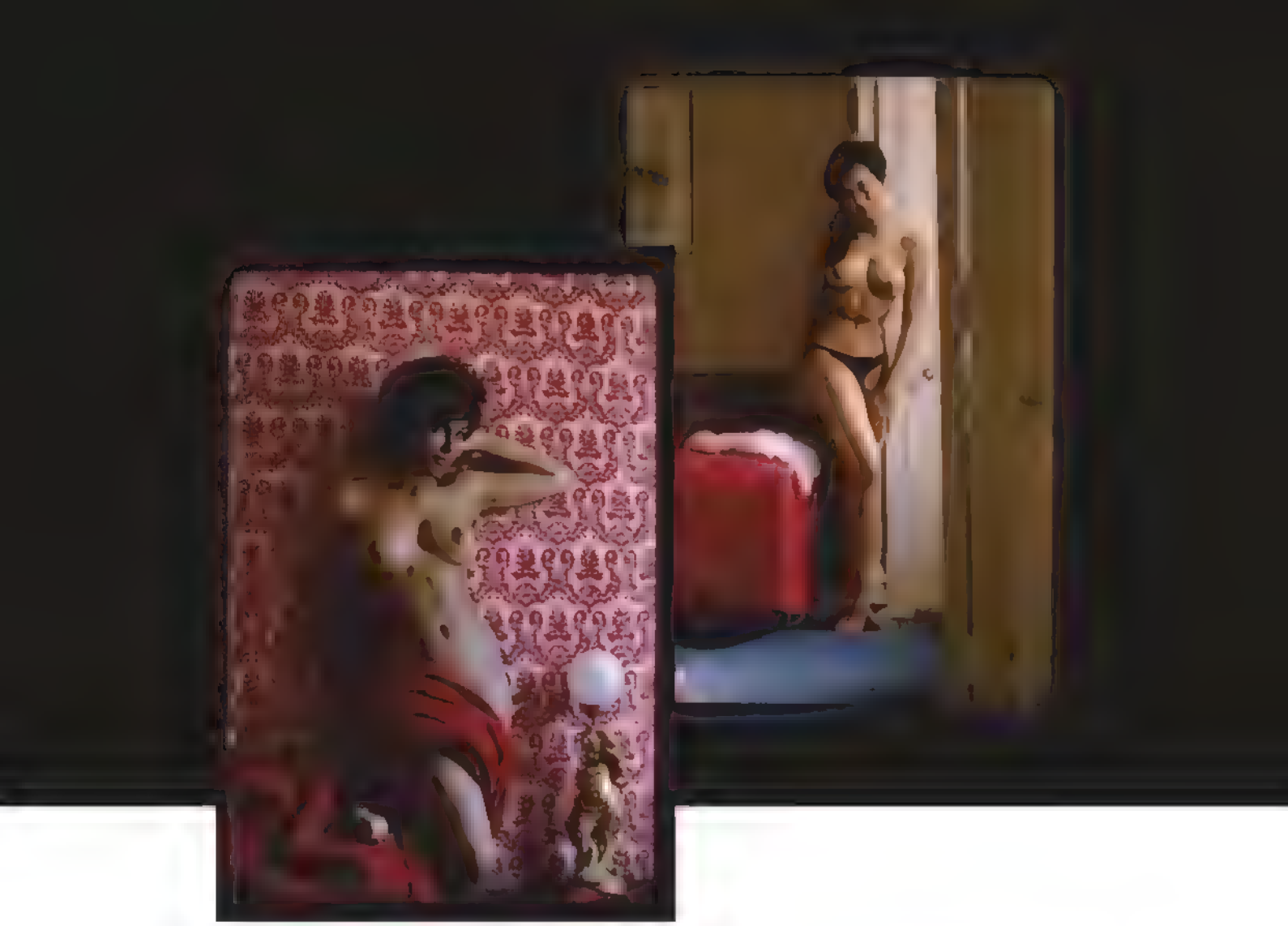
The young man regards Nye with a kind of pie-eyed wonder. When fans come upon him in the flesh, they often look as if they're meeting Santa Claus. Nye, of course, would find this comparison absurd. He is, as he'll be the first to tell you, very real. Very human. It's science.

Seize the Day With Jennifer Jackson

PHOTOGRAPHY BY POMPEO POSAR







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PLAYBOY
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Tell us about the moment you found out you would be featured in the magazine. What was your initial reaction? When I found out I was going to be on the Cover of Playboy Magazine I knew that this was going to be one of the happiest days of my life and I'm so excited and so honored to be on the cover of Playboy magazine it's been my dream since I was a little girl

Can you share your favorite shot or spread from the magazine and why it holds special significance for you? My favorite shot or spread of the magazine has to be the first ever one printed with Marilyn Monroe on the front cover she's my idol and I fell in love with Playboy because of that magazine it's so iconic and so special to me

When you're not working, what helps you decompress and relax? When I'm not working I love to relax at the spa or go shopping to help decompress and making love always works to release and make myself feel amazing and beautiful.

What's the strangest fan encounter you've ever had? The strangest fans I encountered was definitely the ones that stalk my social media and workplace and they have left gifts for me at my office it happens very often.

What's the best "wardrobe malfunction" story that you can now laugh about? The best wardrobe malfunction story that still makes me laugh to this day is when I was dancing at the club and I got on top of the bar like coyote ugly my favorite movie ever and I was dancing so much and having the best night until my entire top ripped off completely on its own and I couldn't even fix it and I ended up getting escorted out of the club and my boobs were exposed the whole night

What are some of your biggest dreams you hope to achieve? Some of my biggest dreams I hope to achieve are Definitely being on the cover of my first Playboy magazine, owning my own lingerie line, and becoming a successful business owner having my own lingerie store I love designing all types of different lingerie

What's the weirdest beauty tip or trick you've picked up? The weirdest beauty tip that I picked up on is to make my boobs have more cleavage I stuff knee-high socks in my bra to make that bombshell look it works every time

If you were stranded on a deserted island with only one accessory, what would it be? If I was stranded on a deserted island with only one accessory it would have to be my pink lipstick vibrator it's a necessity.

What's your go-to guilty pleasure snack? My go-to guilty pleasure snack is whipped cream and cherries it's my favorite I crave it all the time

What is the absolute worst thing a man can do to completely put you off? The absolute worst thing a man can do to completely put me off is being mean to me and also not being loyal those are very important.

What advice would you give to aspiring models? The advice I would give to aspiring models is to never give up chase all your dreams be happy and healthy and stay true to yourself.

Thanks for taking the time to speak to us, do you have any last words to our readers and where can they find you? Here's my Instagram account to find me @sexy_secret_angel and my Playboy account to find me sexy secret angel.

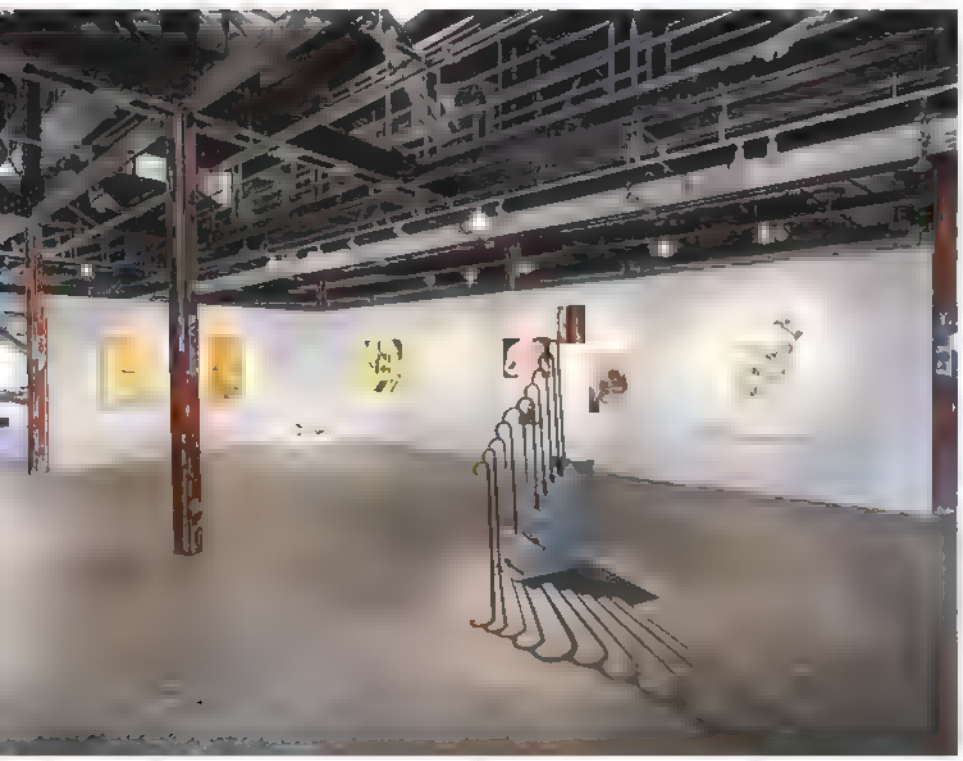
Is Seattle Art Fair the New Art Basel?

DEEDS
DIRT
LUSTY LADY

When you hear the phrase "art scene," Seattle's likely not the first city that comes to mind. Tech, coffee, rain, Kurt Cobain, sure. But art? Not so much—at least, not until now. Art Basel has been the majority shareholder in the U.S. art fair scene since the stateside satellite of the Swiss fair made its debut on the sticky streets of South Beach in 2002. But like most things that start off small and cool (Coachella, Facebook, the Lower East Side), the annual December event in Miami has progressively lost its fundamental sense of underground credibility—one blue-chip gallery, Kanye cameo and Banksy sighting at a time.

Make no mistake: Jay Z dropping R378,300.00 on an up-and-coming artist is a good thing. But the fair's growth inevitably eclipsed the palpable feeling of grassroots creative energy that pulsed through Wynwood and Miami Beach every December as recently as a few years ago. Likewise Armory, Frieze and POW! WOW!

experiment, 2015. "A room sized window looks onto a CIA monitoring station, which in turn looks through an empty, dishevelled motel room." Roxy Paine / Kasmin Gallery



Greg Lundgren renovated Seattle's King Street Station to house Out of Sight - the largest companion fair to Allen's Seattle Art Fair - in 2015. This year's exhibit featured 116 PNW artists selected by Lundgren and co-curator Sierra Stinson. Rafael Soldi

Enter Seattle Art Fair, now in its second year. The brainchild of billionaire Microsoft tech giant, Seahawks owner and avid art collector Paul Allen, the 70,000-square foot, 84-gallery event brought 18,000 visitors to the Emerald City last weekend. A cursory rundown of SAF's stats, which included an exhibitor list of heavy hitters like Pace and David Zwirner, presents like a fully formed Art Basel air-dropped on the West Coast via Jeff Bezos-commissioned drone, but it was the wave of companion fairs and satellite exhibits that elevated Allen's main event from what could have been an impressive-yet-boring gathering to a unique addition to the contemporary art scene.

A slew of local players and international tastemakers used the weekend as an opportunity to piggyback off of the visibility of Allen's event, from Greg Lundgren's Pac Northwest-focused companion fair Out of Sight at the nearby King Street Station, to Superflat, a melting pot of international artists co-curated by Juxtapoz's Evan Pricco and the prolific Takashi Murakami.

James Cohan Gallery, New York. TRENTON DOYLE HANCOCK 2016, 2016 Acrylic and mixed media on canvas 72 x 108 inches

> **"In Seattle, people really focus on the work. It's honest."**

All combined, the weekend's artist list offered a wildly diverse mix of names ranging from celebrities like Fairey, Banksy, Damien Hirst and Adrien Brody (who knew?), to masters like Basquiat, Picasso, Warhol and Jasper Johns, to counter-culture illustrators like R. Crumb and Raymond Pettibon, to less known, graffiti-influenced gems like Fonse and Aerubs, to West Coast talents like the function- and process-focused Ben Venom and Akihiko Miyoshi.

Why Seattle and why now? In addition to the fair's billionaire patron, Seattle houses a huge population of artists doing interesting things in a city without the art-world prestige of L.A., Miami or New York.

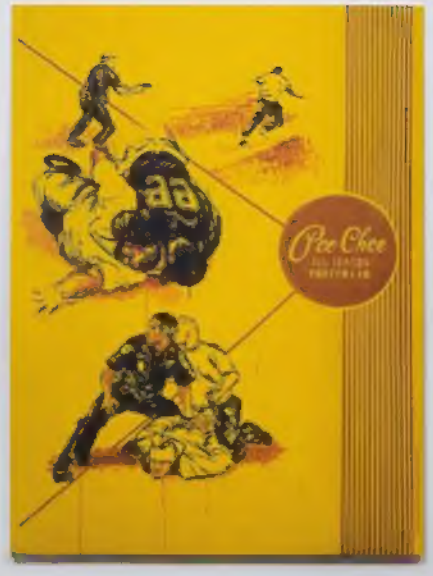
"In Seattle, people really focus on the work," says Greg Lundgren, the man behind SAF's primary companion fair (whose professional credits also include fine art tombstone maker) and owner of retro Seattle nightlife staples Vito's and the Hideout. p"It's honest. It comes from a place of deep contemplation. We have all the ingredients to really start an interesting national and international dialogue. And I think Seattle Art Fair is that thing."

"Not all art needs to be in nerve centers," adds Juxtapoz's Evan Pricco. Of his choice to mount Superflat here, he says, "It's someplace where we can get a big space and try some things out, [while coinciding] with the Fair so it gets a little bit of the energy."

Pricco has a similar reasoning for the "how" as he does for the "where." "I'm on the Internet," he says. "I'm on my phone. I look at art in a way that's so not the way that people looked at art in 1950s." Whether it's a smart-phone screen or an album cover, "it's a different flow," Pricco explains. "I'm a fucking 34-year-old man who likes ceramic art. [This is] also the reason why Seattle's important—not all art needs to be in nerve centers."

If Lundgren and Pricco are right, Seattle's combination of untapped talent, proportionate ego and cash have created a fertile ground for authentic creative energy. The takeaway? Seattle and Seattle Art Fair are the newest contenders-to-watch in the country's contemporary art scene, at least for now.

Below, check out our roundup of seven of the weekend' s most exciting art and artists.



"'Vanita is really a mixture of ideas and emotions, some of which are darker than others. Love can be rotten and love can be sweet," MORGAN ROSSKOPF Vanita, 2016 Mixed media and collage on Fabriano Rosapina 28 x 39 inches

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